

WOMEN'S NETWORKING ACROSS BORDERS

Cooperation, diaspora and migrations between Italy and the Middle East

Edited by Silvia Macchi and Elena Zambelli

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Silvia Macchi is professor of Urban Planning at Sapienza University of Rome, and coordinator of the Section on Policies for the Empowerment of Women at the Interuniversity Research Center for Sustainable Development (CIRPS Sped). Her interests include urban policies from a feminist point of view and political participation of women in local development. She is politically involved in international networks of urban action and in the Women in Black movement. She also collaborates with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in programmes of human development with a main focus on the advancement of women.

Kifah Manasra completed her studies in Psychological Counselling (MA). For years she worked in numerous women's affairs institutions, in addition to having been an administrative member in the Union for Social Workers and Psychologists. Mrs. Manasra worked as an educator in 2 local universities, and has also worked on the Code of Ethics and the Regulatory Law for the professions of Social Work and Psychology in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Today Mrs. Manasra is a field professional development coordinator of UNRWA in the West Bank. In the years 2005-2006, she's been the manager of the Bethlehem's Women Resource and Information Centre.

Monica Mancini holds ten years of professional experience in projects of international cooperation in different European, Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan countries: project design and management, monitoring and evaluation in co-operation with local, regional and international counterparts; advocacy work, network construction and co-ordination, capacity building at institutional and civil society level. She's expert in programmes and strategies for the empowerment of disadvantaged social

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Singer and composer from Guadeloupe, **Josette Martial**, president of Nyeleti Onlus, was born in Madagascar. She studied communication in Paris IV Sorbonne, travelled and lived in Brazzaville (Congo), Kourou (French Guyana), and Paris (France). Since 1981 she lives and works in Rome, Italy. She has always been engaged in human rights and solidarity actions. In 2005 she created the Nwar Dea production organization and started her first international cooperation activity with the Italia-Africa programme, and becomes secretary of the Tabanka Onlus.

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Gabriella Rossetti has been active for the past two decades in programmes and projects in partnership with women across borders, in Africa, the Balkans and the Middle East, with NGOs and GOs. She attended most of the international U.N. Conferences on Women (from Nairobi to Beijing plus five) in association with some of the participants to this seminar. She is author of essays on themes related to these events. Her last book, *Terra Incognita: anthropology and development: African Encounters*, depicts the difficulties and oddities of encounters within unequal relationships. She teaches Anthropology at the University of Ferrara.

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Touria Tajeddine, president of the Network Espace de Citoyenneté, is a high school teacher in Tangiers, Morocco. She's Board member of the national association Women Union Action (UAF) and president of its Tangiers section. Furthermore, she's member of the National Council of the political party Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and of its women's section.

Elena Zambelli holds a degree in History and Institutions of the Middle East (Faculty of Political Sciences, Bologna) and has recently been awarded a Master Degree in Gender and Development (Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University, UK). Since 2003 she's been working in the occupied Palestinian territories within the framework of women's empowerment and good governance initiatives, with both Italian and Palestinian women's NGOs and GOs. Throughout the years, she's been actively participating into the local-global politics of anti-wars as well as (civil, political, social, economic, cultural) rights movements.

Introduction:

Opening spaces for border crossing

Silvia Macchi and Elena Zambelli

Women's networking across borders and conflicts was practiced at least for the past twenty years, covering the most burning global and local issues throughout the planet. Trans-national networking made possible to reach a widely shared consensus during the years of the U.N. Conferences in the 90s (Rio de Janeiro, Cairo, Beijing) where goals were set and strategies designed which are still reference points for global policies. [...] In the meanwhile, crossing borders became the life experience, often painful and not freely chosen, shared by millions. The feminization of migration flows and of diaspora were faced as a political (not only social) issue by women in movements and associations. Face to face encounters forced many to tackle differences and inequalities; from the well known ones between rich and poor areas of the world, to the subtler ambiguities of cultures, value systems, memories, patterns of belonging and of citizenship. Looking for links and shared visions has become more challenging and, we might hope, more rewarding at the end¹.

What we introduce here is a collection of papers given by participants to “*Women's networking*” across borders: cooperation, diaspora and migrations between Italy and the Middle East, a two-day close-door workshop followed by a public meeting in Rome, organised in December 2006 by UNOPS with the scientific support of CIRPS-SPED².

¹ Macchi, S., Pomeranzi, B. and Rossetti, G. (2006) Quotation from the letter of invitation to the seminar, electronic copy.

² The Section on Policies for the Empowerment of Women (SPED) of the Interuniversity Research Centre for Sustainable Development (CIRPS) is based at Sapienza University of Rome and is configured as an interdisciplinary study and research workshop in Gender and Development subjects, with the overriding objective of contributing to the production of

The initiative aims to contribute to innovating development cooperation by fostering more balanced relationships between partners and wider participation of women in decision making at all levels. Can transnational women's networking experiences become a starting point to ignite such a change? What can we learn from them in order to cope with the power imbalances that any relationship entails? To what extent do existing women's networks represent a social capital to be valorised throughout development cooperation programs? Does women's direct involvement in development cooperation guarantee that the goal of empowerment will be actually pursued? Or, rather, does transnational women's networking provide a reference point for building new forms of international partnerships and, meanwhile, for ensuring the decisional framework will be adapted to women's movements political functionings? Or both?

These questions originate from some programs recently implemented by the Central Technical Unit of the Development Cooperation section of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE-DGCS), whereby several women academics and practitioners who are politically active in transnational women's networks have been asked to bring their political and professional expertise in the field of Gender and Development. The opportunity to bring these women together with some who have been working on the other side of the Mediterranean and few others involved in practicing and researching on women's empowerment and international cooperation, has been provided by the project *"Tawasol Women Resource Centres: an experiment in decentralized participatory planning"* – which is a trilateral initiative of MAE-DGCS, UNDP and the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs aiming to provide avenues for the empowerment of Palestinian women living in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. As a matter of fact, this project is part of a wider poverty reduction strategy agreed upon by the Italian government and the Palestinian National Authority. Inaugurated in 2000, its main initiative for fighting poverty through supporting women's empowerment is the Tamkeen program³. After several years of common work, the time was ripe to go deep into the reciprocal understanding of our partnership as well as to harvest the knowledge we produced. Overall, we hope that these thoughts, practices and reflections will contribute to innovate

practice, knowledge and policies for the empowerment of women within the sphere of international cooperation for development.

CIRPS-SPED has provided its scientific support to the workshop in the frame of the project "Centre for documentation and analysis of Gender and Development activities in Local Human Development programmes", promoted by the ART initiative (Appui aux Réseaux Territoriaux et Thématiques de Développement Humain) and entrusted to CIRPS by UNDP in 2006-2007.

³ See Annex I: "Tamkeen: fighting poverty through supporting Palestinian women".

processes of development cooperation policies and programs at MAE-DGCS and within the broader context of the ART initiative.

On one side, the workshop represented an opportunity for women bearers of different backgrounds to set a time to reflect on the effectiveness, shortfalls and capacity of women's networking – both meant as a tool and as a value in itself – to push forward the agenda set in Beijing on both sides of the Mediterranean. Nonetheless, different angle views voiced during the seminar pointed to shortcomings not only in terms of networking *across* borders, but also *within* the borders of each own nation-state (or proto-nation state), as affected not least by the widely discernible phenomena of the NGOization and/or depoliticisation of women's and feminist movements all over the globe.

On the other side, we could not avoid situating ourselves in the difficult political climate post 11/9/2001, that participants have widely acknowledged as a powerful constraint affecting the capacity for transnational women's networks to build channels of exchange and communication across differences. As one of them aptly voiced it, «the critical issue that we have to face, by relying on a different vision as women, is that of peace and war: how to deal with the problems at the global level and with the relationship between and within different peoples, countries, and cultures.»⁴ In this perspective, it is important to recall the inherent transformative potentials of “transversal politics”⁵ as a practice involving the complementary processes of *rooting* oneself into his/her own position, standpoint, identity while *shifting*, achieving empathy towards the other: an approach that takes into account differences while nonetheless emphasizing commonalities.

In this complex and multilayered framework, it is our bet that «women, who have defended and practiced the *difference* of their point of view, still have a lot to say and to do»⁶. By providing a space and a platform for the voices of differently situated women's and feminists' (along axis of generation, class, political ideology, access to resources, etc.), we expect that this rich collection of contributions will feed into a critical re-thinking of key words such as “solidarity”, “empowerment”, “cooperation”, “reciprocity” and “recognition”.

Clearly, *power* represented the pivotal axis along which papers, interviews

⁴ Elisabetta Donini, intervention during the seminar, transcript from tapes.

⁵ The term *politica trasversale* was invented by Elisabetta Donini and translated into “transversal politics” by Nira Yuval-Davis. See Yuval-Davis, N. (1997) *Gender and Nation*, London: Sage.

⁶ Macchi, S., Pomeranzi, B. and Rossetti, G. (2006) Quotation from the letter of invitation to the seminar, electronic copy.

and conversations converged: who has the power to decide what and where, with and without whom, and why. Nonetheless, most of the participants have also been wary of simply positioning themselves along the North/South divide. On one side, this stems from the self-evident acknowledgement that power imbalances and asymmetries rather cut across this divide whose descriptive and explanatory potential has been outdated by processes of neo-liberal globalisation. On the other side, it points to our own selves as bearers of multiple identities – i.e. powerless as women of the South vis-à-vis Northern women (and the opposite), but powerful (i.e. from the elite) in our own context –: a complexity which in turn can find expression into our own engagement into multiple and sometimes contradictory alliances.

Similarly, *participation* conceived of as both a tool and a goal, emerged as a widely felt imperative if we are indeed to shape and practice inclusive and shared visions of development, insofar as it embodies potentials for practicing alternatives to the traditional, hierarchical “donor-beneficiary” relationship. However, such processes need time as well as each and every partner’s steady and coherent commitment to their shared values and practices, if the multiple facets of power imbalances which are produced and reproduced within and among the nodes of the “net” are to be contrasted. Nonetheless, we also wish to recall and remind ourselves how «respect and equality among partners do not imply sameness.»⁷

Women's networking: creating transnational public spaces to shape new political subjectivities

The three papers collected in this section contextualise the theoretical framework within which the seminar has been premised.

The paper of **Gabriella Rossetti** gives us a theoretical and political historical perspective on the emergence and development of transnational women's networks, highlighting some of the contemporary challenges and obstacles they face in terms of unequal distribution of power both in aid and solidarity politics. The author stresses the richness of women's experience as *borders crossers*, highlighting some key concepts such as “recognition”, “reciprocity”, “shared and un-sharable goals”. Following different paths in reaching out to meet *other* women, solidarity campaigns and development practices are discussed. Several questions are asked: how to fill the gap between decisions made in designing policies and programmes and the real, deep and complex social life of those programmes? How to solve the

⁷ Elham Hamad Sami, intervention during the seminar, transcript from tapes.

paradox by which «when you come close to decision making which affects many, you are in the company of very few» while «when you establish the sort of relationships which allow discussions on differences [...] you are not sitting at the top levels of political decision making»?⁸ Drawing on some experience in development programs in different regions, including the Middle East, the paper aims at provoking discussion on distance, difference and conflict which make women's networks valuable and transformative.

Ruba Salih talks of challenges and opportunities embedded in transnational women's networking across the Mediterranean, focusing in particular on the role of women in the diasporas in forging transnational public spheres. After a theoretical section on how transnationalism – as shaped by gender and generation – challenges old perceptions of membership, loyalties and citizenship, she focuses on different experiences of networking among Middle Eastern women residing in the diaspora, especially in Europe, and feminist and activist women back in their countries of origin – pointing to the different cases of Moroccan, Kurdish and Iranian women. Whereas the author brings to the fore how transnational public spheres engendered by women activists have enormous political potentials, a closer examination to some experiences of “networking across borders” reveals how this is a complex terrain which could produce empowering effects but that does not eradicate asymmetries altogether. Accordingly, this acknowledgement demands a reflection on how international financing for women's organizations transnational networking does actually impinge upon Middle Eastern women's avenues for fostering agendas of social change, exposing them to the risk of becoming dependent on both their own state and the donors' national policies.

Bianca Pomeranzi kicks off by exposing her complex and multilayered positioning at the intersection between working within a “development” institution while keeping up to her feminist transformatory goals, whereby she gives an account of how she catalyzed the translation of the suggestions, practices and new perspectives arising from women's networks situated in the global South into forging new “institutional” practices for development cooperation. After a critical analysis of the global “state of art” of current development cooperation strategies and modalities, she exposes us how the practices of Italian women's and feminist networks influenced as well as prompted a “transformative” approach into Italian gender and development policies. In the concluding section of her paper, the author traces the origins of the Tamkeen program, whereby she spells how relationships between Italian women's networks and some Palestinian ones active during the first

⁸ See Gabriella Rossetti's paper “Geographies of partnership”, published in this book.

Intifada played a critical role in catalyzing Italian and Palestinian institutions' recognition of the strategic value of gender equality and women's empowerment in a country's development. However, in light of the forced halt to the program's second phase due to the Quartet's boycott of the PA, she overall questions whether programs for women's empowerment in fragile states should refrain from entering the realm of the institutional-building of gender entities due to their weakness in front of the "real political power". Eventually, such complex experiences force us to acknowledge how the analysis of asymmetrical power relationships between women and men in situations of conflicts is still insufficient, especially in the present scenario which is characterized by aggressive international politics.

Women's networking and international cooperation in the Middle East

Voices from Palestine

In this section we give voice to women who have been actively involved in searching for intersections between their experiences of women's and/or feminist networks-building, and projects of development cooperation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The first three contributions come from Palestinian women who have been differently involved in implementing the first phase of the Tamkeen program – funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and implemented in partnership with the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs. These interviews form a sort of conversation among Palestinian women who are differently positioned within their society, and in its history-making. The tensions they highlight give us a taste of the obstacles encountered in the construction of effective women's networks within and across borders: from the ever-deteriorating political scenario, to the generational gap within women's movements, to outsiders' lack of understanding of "the culture".

The opening is left to **Zahira Kamal**, former Minister of Women's Affairs as well as well-known activist and advocate for women's rights and for a just peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this contribution, wide space is left to recalling Tamkeen program's good governance tenets and participatory methodology, whereby the newly established Ministry has opened avenues for (proto)state – civil society relations through the involvement of (some) Palestinian women's organizations at the national and local level, and (some) Palestinian women academicians. In this framework, partnership with Italian women was meant to be an opportunity for sharing

and intersecting different experiences of women's and feminist's networks building – be they directly implying the flow of financial resources (i.e. through projects, etc.), solidarity commitments, or both. Throughout the interview, in which she also dialogues with other seminar's participants and speakers, Ms. Kamal highlights some of the obstacles encountered in building and renovating internal and transnational alliances aiming to foster the “advancement” of Palestinian women – as women, and as Palestinians. Meanwhile, she claims for experiences of development cooperation such as the Tamkeen program not to be left without documentation, «so that it is possible to build on them, have deeper discussions on the subjects, and come up with a methodology of building partnerships as related to the empowerment of women on both sides – thus, including the donor's side, as well as the participation of the people involved in the networking.»⁹

The second interview is to **Kifah Manasra**, who has been the manager of Bethlehem's Women Resource and Information Centre (*Tawasol*, in Arabic) in the framework of the Tawasol project. In her intervention, she highlights some of the contemporary weaknesses of the Palestinian women's movement both in terms of representation capacity, as well as in terms of building and pushing forward a unitary women's agenda beyond personal affiliations to competing political parties (whose leaderships are nonetheless wholly men-dominated). In light of the deteriorating living conditions in Palestine, she further questions the effectiveness of international/transnational feminist and/or women's networking in facilitating an enabling environment for sustainable change to happen on the ground. In her opinion «the Italian women movement could play a positive role inside the Palestinian society, supporting the re-organizing of the relationship between all its institutions, governmental and non – considering that organising is in itself a tool for empowerment.»¹⁰

The third is an interview to **Elham Hamad Sami**, who has been the manager of the Tawasol project on behalf of the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs throughout 2005-06. Hers is a critical reflection on the participatory practices that have been played out in the project, whereby she spells some of the obstacles that prevented these methodologies to be effective and sustained over time. Among others: the persistence of hierarchical procedures; lack of transparency among the differently positioned stakeholders (donors, state, civil society); and overall the difficulties stemming from framing people's life and societal dynamics into a

⁹ See the interview to Zahira Kamal by Elena Zambelli, “The role of international cooperation in the empowerment of Palestinian women”, published in this book.

¹⁰ See the interview to Kifah Manasra by Elena Zambelli, “Bridging divides among women”, published in this book.

“development project”. If we are to talk about “partnerships” as a transformatory mode of action challenging North-South power imbalances, *time* in its lengthiness and unpredictable trajectories becomes central in ensuring that substantial (versus formal) participation is sustained. In conclusion, she questions priorities and strategies of women’s networking vis-à-vis the rubber wall of the men-dominated Palestinian political scenario and, like Kifah Manasra, she points strategically to the need to open communication channels among women of all parties if “a new feminine culture” is to break-through.

The next three contributions given by Italian women who have been thoroughly participating in implementing women’s empowerment projects and programs in the oPt, present a whole set of different standpoints stemming *from* and *at* the intersections between their lives “here” (in Italy) and “there” (in Palestine).

The paper of **Silvia Macchi** kicks off by spelling out the reasons that prompted her to partake in the Tamkeen programme and which, later, led her to choose this initiative as a case study in her academic research on women’s empowerment policies. Then, she analyses the relationship between women’s networking and development cooperation in light of the results achieved by and through the Tamkeen programme. Particularly bearing in mind women who have to strike a balance between the practices of feminist movements and those of development aid projects, she eventually puts forward some recommendations aimed at guaranteeing reciprocal benefits. First of all, if wider and more effective women’s political participation is to be promoted, she suggests resisting development cooperation’s requirements for decision-making centralisation by taking the risk of delegating powers to many groups rather than a single one. Secondly, she underlines that there is no guarantee that supporting women’s networking will result in forging new and steady partnerships. «There will always be an element of uncertainty, which is what history is all about, to make the process as unpredictable as it is uncontrollable»¹¹. Finally, she urges not to forget that if women’s networking has its rules, so does development cooperation. «Both these sets of rules must be known and respected if we really want to make progress in one area and the other.»¹²

The contribution of **Irene Agnello** briefly traces the trajectory of the Italian feminist NGO “Differenza Donna”: from its establishment in Italy to contribute stopping violence against women mainly through the creation of

¹¹ See Silvia Macchi’s paper “When transnational women’s networking meets development cooperation”, published in the book.

¹² *ibidem*

anti-violence centres, up to its international move to the occupied Palestinian territories by means of a project funded by the Italian government. Situating the relevance and appropriateness of the project within the overall framework of public and private forms of violence against women in Palestine, she discloses some of the challenges encountered in building a shared vision among women and feminists bearers of different and complex positionings – along axis of class, political praxis and/or affiliation, culture, religion, etc. –, stressing the need for a space and a time to be set at the very outset of any project in order for partners to listen to and learn from each other's experiences.

In conclusion of this section, **Elena Zambelli** looks critically at the discrepancies between the internationally endorsed rhetoric of “good governance” and the Quartet's boycott of the Palestinian Authority following the victory of Hamas in January 2006 parliamentary elections. Through her personal (situated) lenses, she highlights the critical and oftentimes painful intersections between *public* frameworks of aid interventions and *private* agency of development practitioners': from partaking in the reproduction of the very same dynamics that relentlessly produce Palestinian Authority's chronic dependency and vulnerability; to the acknowledgement that the dialectic relationship between women's empowerment strategies and the Palestinian national agenda cannot be split into two parallel tracks but rather have to be taken up responsibility for simultaneously, at all levels. Acknowledging that the power differentials embedded in the very system of international aid/development cannot be erased but only assumed responsibility for, in the conclusions she drafts some recommendations for a more transparent, mutually accountable and committed partnership across borders. The first, is that we are compelled to acknowledge that there cannot be development cooperation in Palestine “despite” the Israeli occupation: thus, the relevance of concepts and practices of “empowerment” should be evaluated against the provision of spaces, options and means to challenge the constraints derived by the encroaching Israeli occupation. The second, is that, as feminists living in the West (rather than necessarily Western), we have to learn to get involved into dialectic versus preconceived dialogues and exchanges within and beyond our long-established partnerships, overall learning to recognise and get involved with new interlocutors, as seemingly distant as they can appear.

Voices from the Mediterranean basin

In this second section we have gathered the contributions of three women deeply involved in building relationships on and between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

On the basis of their experiences in the field of development cooperation with women from Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, **Maria Grazia Ruggerini** and **Monica Mancini** reflect on principles and practices of partnerships-building across multiple differences that stem from our own complex and multiple identities and positionings. For this purpose, they identify some elements and trends that could constitute a shared standpoint on which to establish alliances across national borders: from a common denominator to be acknowledged in being embed into patriarchal cultures, to women's emerging protagonism in the Mediterranean basin. Nonetheless, the assumption of these factors as transversally shared does not imply sameness. On the contrary: awareness of the existing tension between universalism and cultural relativism as well as of its precarious and subjective balancing, brings the authors to advocate for a "third way". In conclusion, they highlight some of the challenges that women's networks have to face to meet their transformatory goals: from the generational gap within women's movements and organizations, to the friend/enemy dynamic that flattens the space for accommodating complexities, to a critical reflection on whether and how to engage with men in fostering the advancement of women's equality.

As president of the Network *Espace de Citoyenneté*, **Touria Tajeddine** provides us with some examples of successful women's networking strategies in the countries of Maghreb. Networks-building is seen as an opportunity for women to break the barriers of isolation and multiply their potentialities in pushing their agendas forward. She considers women's networks as standing at the core of the political transformations taking place in the region, and as prime actors of democracy in the South, whose relevance is to be found not least in their capacity to contrast the growth of conservative forces in the area. In light of the growing interconnectedness of peoples, cultures and economies of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, it is also argued that a North-South approach – to development cooperation, for example – is obsolete, and should be rather replaced with cross-national coordination.

Radically departing from this very last point, **Maha Abu Dayyeh** gives us a sharp critique of Northern feminists' rhetoric of equalizing power relations in their relationships with Southern's, arguing that it is far from being actually translated into practice. This is particularly evident in the problematic encounter between women's (political) networks and international cooperation: who has the power to solve an emerging problem is the arbiter of the dispute. And more often than not, it is Northern feminists who are *naturally* bearers and gate-keepers of this power. Within such a power (im)balance, alliances with Northern feminists' risk to become a

liability for Southern's, who are daily facing the growth of conservative forces within their own societies. European feminists' support to Middle Eastern women's movement can be fruitful insofar as the first provide «full respect and understanding of the local context, and without conditionality nor instrumentality», and understand that «local women are taking the lead in the local scene.»¹³

The politics of migrant women's transnational networking – between philanthropy and international cooperation

In a growingly interconnected world, human migrations pose a complex set of challenges and opportunities for both hosting and sending countries.

On one side, migrants challenge the traditional definition of citizenship on which European nation-states have been premised, bringing to the fore the impelling need to find avenues to respect and accommodate diversities within a shared legal framework of rights and responsibilities. From a feminist perspective, this points to the perennial tension between universalism and cultural relativism, whereby *a* homogeneous definition of “culture” can sometimes be used as a shield to prevent changes from taking course (i.e. in terms of advancing women's rights), thus maintaining existing gender relations of power. Or, on the opposite, such a monolithic understanding of a people's “culture” can be used as a measure stick to judge its “stage of civilization”, producing marginalization and criminalization. Overall, workshop participants stressed the urgency to build a new feminist postcolonial discourse that would accommodate and give a fruitful account of complexities challenging the flattening and polarizing effects of stereotyped and stereotyping Manichean discourses.

On the other side, migrations are increasingly receiving attention in light of the potentialities for remittances to be fruitfully employed in financing for migrant's countries of origin's development. In this perspective, we are keen to bring to the fore the submerged individual and collective agency of women migrants. As Ruba Salih commented during the seminar's debates, research on women's transnational involvement in transnational politics shows that sometimes women do have hidden agendas in this process (i.e. to empower themselves in the host countries, to gain visibility in the receiving country). Thus, transnational politics is also about getting a transnational public role in a transnational public sphere. Nonetheless, we should be

¹³ See Maha Abu-Dayyeh's paper “Women's networking in the fight against violence”, published in this book.

careful not to forget that these processes are actually painful – if we consider, for example, the huge literature on the difficulties women face in establishing transnational families: employed as domestic workers in the West, while having to maintain and sustain their children back home, and the pain and sense of guiltiness they feel for this separation.

In this section, we are then to introduce another dimension concerning women's "longing and belonging"¹⁴, which is the space for migrant women's direct engagement in the standard channels of international aid/development cooperation money flowing from the North to the South of the world.

In her paper, **Charito Basa** presents us the main findings of a research she recently completed on the philanthropy activities in which migrant and exile women in Italy are engaged in favour of their countries of origins. She highlights motivations and priorities that guide them in investing (part of) their remittances, in "giving back" to their home countries, finding that their choices are frequently driven by welfare concerns for the weakest and the poorest within their communities. Overall, she sheds light on women's roles and contributions to the development of their countries of origins, as well as on the processes of empowerment and self-assertiveness opened up by these avenues for transnational engagement between *here* and *there*. By valorising their experiences, knowledge and transnational bonds, she raises the case for enhancing migrant and exile women's involvement in the system of development cooperation at all levels and spheres.

The concluding intervention is left to **Josette Martial**, who provides us with the lived experience of Cape Verdean women's transnational engagement in international cooperation between *her* – Italy, in this case – and *there*. The two associations of African women living in the diaspora she's a member of – Tabanka and Nyeleti – orient their work both towards "giving back" financial resources to their countries of origins, not least as a mean to restore justice in a post-colonial perspective; as well as towards building a constructive dialogue among African and Italian communities in Italy. In light of the challenges that human migrations set to European nation-states' traditional construction of citizenship, as well as in the midst of an aggressive ideology of the clash of civilizations, this last point seem to be particularly appropriate for promoting bridges among communities, rather than erecting walls. Overall, it acknowledges how development in the South – in its failures as much as in its potentialities – does not take place in a vacuum, but rather in the interconnectedness of people's lives, choices and

¹⁴ Salih, Ruba (2003) *Gender in Transnationalism: Home, Longing and Belonging Among Moroccan Migrant Women*. New York: Routledge.

power dynamics all over the globe.

During the conversations that followed the speakers' presentations, some seminar's participants shared their own experiences in organizations or networks that were bridging among as well as bringing together native (in this case, Italian) and migrant women. **Deborah Angeli** spoke of "Punto di Partenza" (*Starting Point*) in Florence, Italy, which has started a kind of work/process called *the world a-reverse*, whereby, for example, "important" women from the South – artists, writers, politicians, etc. – were called to hold training sessions for Italian women and feminists. Such and similar events provided opportunities for Northern and Southern women to discuss together what model of development to promote *jointly* and *globally* – rather than accepting the (neo-colonial) hierarchies whereby a part of the world's vision of development is merely exported upon another's reality. And this was particularly poignant for what concerns analysis on Western's feminism and its approach to differences. **Elisabetta Donini** briefly presented us the processes that in the early 90s led to the establishment in Turin of "Almaterra" (*Earth's soul*), and to a sister organization in Bolivia, Cusco Almaterra I, few years afterwards. Returning to their country of origins not only as individuals, but also as subjects of a collective initiative (in this case, it was a project of development cooperation), the Bolivian women who had been working with and within Almaterra had to review their own positioning within their society: from being migrant and living oftentimes at the margins of the host country, they had to adjust themselves to being middle/upper class in their country of origin. Nonetheless, the experience "at the margins" they were bearers of, proved to be crucial for them to escape philanthropic relationships, and rather build with (some) native Bolivian women a shared vision of societal changes.

Reflective conclusions

Did the workshop provide us with answers to our questions? Not really. Rather, it helped us to reshape them and, above all, it gave us the feeling that there is a strong need for such spaces-times where women bearing different backgrounds, personal histories and, imaginably, future trajectories, can meet to reflect critically on what principles and values their encounter has been premised upon, and on how these can be re-thought of in order to substantiate visions and practices of women's empowerment in partnering for a more equal, just and peaceful world.

Moreover, most of the participants widely voiced the need for the processes (vs. mere results) of partnerships – histories, actor's voices and memories,

pathways – to be documented far beyond what is the common understanding of “project reporting”. Not least, because «those who have worked in development cooperation know that there is a tendency to erase the past, whereas paradoxically development is in itself a vision of the future»¹⁵.

Documentation represents a way to broaden the number of women who can get involved in exchanging their experiences, confronting their views and depositing their knowledge, facilitating the encounter among differently positioned women's public, private and political spaces, principles and practices within and beyond “development cooperation”. Meanwhile, documenting processes of partnerships also provides development's practitioners and decision-makers with the challenge: to put partnership-building at the core of each own's and everyone's work: a challenge that, if taken responsibly and not rhetorically, we think will necessarily imply radically deconstructing and reconstructing strategies, priorities and means used for achieving a yet too unquestioned “common (whose?) goal of (what?) development”.

This being said, the workshop highlighted how ambiguous, how equivocal, words like *networking* and *partnership* are, even when employed within a group of women who are used to work together in the framework of development projects or political initiatives which have put these words at the core of their very premises. Obviously these two terms embody different meanings: networking emphasizes the *exchanging* dimension of the relationship whereas partnership recalls and demands *mutual responsibility*. Nevertheless, both of them evoke some relationship-making: that is what makes them so valuable to us.

Is then these words' ambiguity a problem? And, if so, to what extent? Seen from another perspective, this very ambiguity indeed opens up spaces for outplaying different, multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations, eventually allowing participants the freedom to be creative in setting, stretching and deepening (or not) their mutual relationships.

Nevertheless, this kind of “freedom” is often only apparent, and rather deeply shaped by the context where the encounter happens. As for development cooperation projects, and preeminently in the case of “public aid”, a number of constraints arise from national and international policies of both donor and beneficiary countries. Moreover, the encounter is framed by and within a series of expectations embodied in the role format of “aid to development” which not only are very hard to get rid of in order to allow the out-spell of participants' creativity in relationship-building, but also prevent

¹⁵ Gabriella Rossetti, intervention during the seminar, transcript from tapes.

the questioning of the frame itself, i.e. the very notions of *development*, *aid* and *cooperation*.

In other words, in spite of the seemingly indefinite meanings of *networking* and *partnership*, their uses in development cooperation can and do hide the fact that projects' participants have to comply with a number of preventively defined bonding conditions. This represents a serious threat to the innovative potential that transnational women's networking experiences are supposed to bring into development cooperation both as a model to refer to for building more balanced partnerships and as a way to ensure that the project functioning will be suitable to enabling women's empowerment processes.

Eventually, what we've achieved through this seminar was mainly to try to mention some of these constraints and to do it in such a way that could accommodate differences in perspectives, language, positionings of the different actors (participants). Mentioning is just a first step: it does not mean that the constraints have been overcome, but it allows to identify them as well as their embedded stiffness.

The overarching question – among many others – which we are left to deal with is: what can we do? Minimally, the recommendation that comes out of the workshop – and which is embodied by the workshop itself – is to provide participants with space and time, at the very beginning of a project and throughout all its phases, for exploring in-depth the settled bounds to action and for constructing an enabling environment in which they would feel empowered to negotiate more suitable conditions.

Part One

Women's networking: creating transnational public spaces to shape new political subjectivities

Geographies of partnership

Gabriella Rossetti

Women's networks: a background

When the world was, more often than it happens nowadays, divided into North and South, the first women's trans-national networks were created. When, coming from the "South", feminine postcolonial voices were heard, they claimed the right of breaking some of the illusions of "global feminism". They refused identifications they had not chosen ("we, African or Asian women are not the same as you European women, we don't want to be caught into your net").

We were in the mid 80s (around the U.N. third Conference on Women in Nairobi of 1985) when DAWN was launched. This network, Development Alternatives with Women for the New Era, is still alive as «a network of women scholars and activists from the economic South who engage in feminist research and analysis of the global environment and are committed to working for economic justice, gender justice and democracy. DAWN works both globally and regionally in partnership with other global NGOs and networks in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific» – we can still read this in their web site. There was some kind of prophetic spirit in that beginning and other networks followed, WEDO, WIDE, AWID, WLUML¹⁶, etc., in a general effort to play with similarities and differences (often with conflicts too) within the format of "nets" or, better, of "networks". *Sisterhood is Global* had been the name of a network of the first generation, promoted by the well known New York based feminist, Robin Morgan, who proudly called it «the first international feminist think-tank, an organization pledged to visionary yet pragmatic action in support of women's rights, freedoms, and power». But it was precisely this "globalism" (not to mention the fallacies of "sisterhood") which had to be re-examined in

¹⁶ Respectively: Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO); Women in Development Europe (WIDE); Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID); Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML).

depth. From then on, uttering the words “WE women” became more like aiming at a goal than assuming a starting point. Feminist transnational networks were also created as tentative efforts to establish commonalities through the innovative practices and thinking of feminism. Identifying the feminist quality of a network as different from that of a women's net, became a challenging exercise. When trying to meet the challenge, authors were very cautious, as it is shown in the following quote from a book which tried to answer the question whether “feminists” could engage in the transnational endeavour of doing “development work” (one of the first options open for North-South networking):

while we recognize the contested nature of the category “woman”, and would certainly resist any notion that any aspect of the condition of women was universal, rather than being situated in the concrete, culturally and politically specific situation, there is, nevertheless, some association between the aims and practice of feminism and the experiences of women's lives and struggles that provides links across the boundaries of difference. (Porter and Judd, 1999: 5)

The cautiousness of this paragraph is then corrected by the optimistic trust in sharing a common ground. After all, women all over the world see and share. «This tension between the recognition of specificity and difference among women, and the struggle to arrive at some kind of global understanding and action together with resistance to a model imposed by the North» (ibidem). Very seldom issues of methodologies were mentioned, like the difference between framing the “women's condition” as a problem to be solved alongside others, and/or mentioning the liberation of a “voice” (Hirschman, 1974) of a very particular kind: gendered, embodied and coming from a long experience of being silenced. How the new women's knowledge on the world and on the self could be produced and sustained as an irreversible new *habitus*, capable of radical changes in the relationships between the sexes (from then on re-labeled “gender relationships”) was left out of most agendas of the new trans or international networks.

What are they?

But what exactly are transnational networks? They are:

structures organized above the national level that unite women from three or more different countries around a common agenda such as women's human rights, violence against women, reproductive health, peace and antimilitarism or feminist economics. [...].They

are part of the family of political change organizations, defined as transnational advocacy networks, global civil society organizations, transnational social movements organizations, [...] which constitute the making of a transnational public sphere. [...] Globalization has brought social movements across borders together in a real as well as conceptual space in which movements interact, contest each other and learn from each other. (Moghadam, 2005: 5)

Starting from the mid 80s, institutions were created in order to adapt to this new form of political organization: U.N. agencies, conventions, conferences. All this stimulated a lot of traveling to special places: extraterritorial locations, where new temporary communities were formed. Some networks became themselves political agents lobbying on inter-national, multilateral institutions, namely those linked to the U.N. system.

Almost in the meanwhile, what was called the “NGOization of women’s movements” took place all over the world, with different meanings according to different local contexts: perceived as a failure or an eclipse of the movements or as a tool for mainstreaming and empowerment. Collateral effects, in many parts of the world, were the creation of new elites, as well as the complex relationships of dependency and negotiation with funding agencies.

For women in Europe, NGOization often meant drawing the image of *other* women mainly as victims. In order to gain audience and support (financial support), European NGO’s produced posters of hungry children and destitute women, de-contextualizing them and playing unconsciously on familiar iconography¹⁷. It meant, most of all, to see the image of “one global movement” break down into several different streams; two of them made of particularly troublesome waters: the stream of cooperation (for development) equal to “aid”; and that of solidarity.

In the first, women had to face the predicament of the transfer of resources (money, know-how, technologies, assets) from one place to the other mediated by central or local Governments, but always also by *women* in special key positions in their governments. If the mediation was done by NGOs, women’s associations were transformed over time into “brokers” or translators between the “needy” and the “rich”.

In the second stream, that of solidarity movements, reciprocity and mutual recognition became (and still are) a challenge for both theoretical thinking and politically effective practices. Here, when networks are created, they are

¹⁷ Exotic Madonnas with dead Christs in their laps populate the world of NGO’s campaigning for support to third world women.

focused on one issue (if it is Palestine, it is the occupation; if it is Nigeria, it is the stoning of women; if it is refugee camps, it is the issue of rape, etc.). The quality of this mobilization is a complex and varied mix of knowledge (expanded beyond one's national information system), moral indignation, empathy, compassion, identification with the victim seasoned with a passion for universality of human rights. Yet, solidarity movements seem unable to develop effective answers to the violations of rights around which they build their mobilizing capacity.

Both these streams should have conveyed the waters of "women's global and local politics", framed into a few sketchy principles whose universal validity went unquestioned for quite a while.

Equal relationships: are they possible? Are they necessary?

Here we want to focus on the quality of the relationship that these two frames provide and allow, and on whether, or under which conditions, they can create enabling environments for the development and strengthening of trans national networks.

To start with, one question we might ask is: is it really inevitable that the perception of sharing common goals (if not interests: the difference is important) breaks down when framed into the aid system? Isn't the goal of economic justice addressed by aid policies? Isn't the aid system geared to redress unbalances of power and resources? Couldn't these be perceived as common goals by the receivers and the mediators (who are not donors themselves) when all are women committed to transform their place in their respective societies? Apparently, all this being true, development work could be seen as something which can strengthen transnational policies and alliances. Why then it does not seem to be so? There are some obvious, easy answers to this question which point to the break down of equal relationships and mutual recognition due to power games which shape a relationship, transforming it into a competition for the control – often not shared – of programs and projects; and to the resentment for the perceived unequal division of labor and tasks. Also, the ghost of "pre-assigned" positions haunts the relationship of aid-cooperation: the roles of colonizer and colonized, but also those assigned by a "gift economy" which creates social debts impossible to extinguish: all these aspects become detrimental especially when women are involved. An anecdote might show that these issues are not as marginal as one might think. During a recent meeting of a transnational women's network called "Feminist Dialogue", there were plenary sessions and group discussions on general issues like the definition

of democracy, the different experiences of militarism in each region of the planet. Participants were invited to use any means of communication they liked, including videos and short documentaries, but it was explicitly forbidden to show videos produced by the “donors”, i.e. the funders of the single associations belonging to the network, even if they were, in their turn, women’s transnational organizations sharing the same goals as the ones directly represented by the participants (who came from Africa, South America, Asia and also Europe and North America): the very fact that they had funded the meeting was considered a reason good enough to exclude them from it.

It looks as if, when there is transfer of money, there cannot be alliances among women and vice versa. Could this be understood as resistance to the levelling effect of the monetarization of relationships and a taste for or a special attention to non marketable goods as potential alternatives to the dominance of the market system? I like to think that this resistance is not a symptom of marginality, or of a survival of pre market economies, but a precious reserve of radical criticism which needs to be looked into in-depth.

On the other hand, the gratuity of solidarity does not guarantee any reciprocity: the group which calls for support (protection, lobbying, etc.) will not necessarily be ready to give (directly or not) similar support to others caught in a comparable difficult situation. Solidarity is very often a temporary non sustainable movement, unable to project visions which could inform people’s lives for long enough to support networks and form alliances.

In both cases then, the shadow of an unequal relationship is cast on women’s networks, since both in aid and solidarity politics a women’s world was divided between the haves and the have-not, between victims and non victims, while the very structure and meaning of networks seem to require equal relationships among its members.

We stop here for a while wondering about what is meant by speaking of networks.

Something new?

I belong to the generation of those who were not born in the culture of networks, webs, and networking. For many of us the image of a net suggested that of a fisherman, somebody who holds the net, or its handle. If you are not that one, you could figure yourself as being caught in the net or living, more or less mindlessly, outside any net at all, “by yourself”,

“minding your own businesses”. At best, the image suggested the relation between a vanguard and its followers, the leaders and the grass roots; in this model, hierarchies were considered necessary for the sake of efficacy and efficiency. The goal of the action was postponed in a future to be conquered through political struggles. The imaginary and vocabulary owed a lot to some sort of militarization of political activism, since conflict was at the heart of any meaningful action and we were short of alternative ways of nourishing, facing, managing and transforming conflicts.

Later, the “net” changed its meaning: it became a different kind of image or metaphor, because many things were changing in the world. Changes which have become part of a shared common sense by now.

The structures and forms of political action changed. Political parties went under harsh criticism, often led by women's movements, because of their inability to give voice and space to many, to promote differences and equality together. The very concept of collective political “subjects” whose interests were supposed to be shared as in a community, was abandoned. Feminist movements criticized the possibility of producing any knowledge concerning the change any group might want, if not directly worked up and expressed by the actors themselves “starting from their own selves”.

But the net has also been, perhaps first of all, the form suggested or imposed to any politically minded group/community/movement by “globalization” (Moghadam, 2005) which suggests the necessity of creating trans-national links, partly bypassing nation-states and their inter-national connecting systems. Transit, crossing, being at the borders and in border-spaces becomes more and more the life experience of many in migrations and diaspora. Also, connecting within virtual space became a necessary component of the lives of more and more women and men, wherever they might physically locate themselves, while processes of de-territorialization shape the lives of women, men and things. «Spatial tactics» (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003: 30) are used as a strategy or technique of power to close or open borders, create divisions and classify people and spaces, while «the spatial tactics of the weak are mobility and detachment from the rationalized spaces of power» (id. 32). Distance is created next to home, when fortress cities are built while the image of a borderless globe is offered to design the stage on which macro politics and macro economics perform. Landscapes become actors in conflicts when they are contested and communities are endlessly re-invented, attached to land, country, soil, ethnicity and also to de-territorialized imagination and shared memories. Some say that, in this scenario, «The so-called community of interests is condemned even before it can be born and it tends to disintegrate before being able to test itself» (Bauman, 2001: 83). Yet, there are those who

persist and resist in looking for threads which might re-create bonds. The thread (what it is made of, is a different question) was to be used to workout nets.

How do networks work? Pros and cons

Transnational networks are becoming objects of study and research (which means that they are perceived at some distance). They are focused on specific kinds of political action: lobbying and advocacy, which aim at influencing governments' policies, more than at creating constituencies or inducing change on a large scale.

Are networks good in themselves? If we see the link between globalization and networking, we must admit that global capitals are networking and so are mafia and criminal enterprises; fundamentalisms and terrorisms of various kinds and nature. Who does the networking and why, with which goals, becomes therefore quite an important information to collect.

In any case, networks are one face of a new condition which someone likes to call, using an old discredited term, cosmopolitanism – «the network is one face of cosmopolitanism» (Vertovec and Cohen, 2003: 25). Not only we cross national borders, but, in so doing over time, we might create a really new space which has the world, (the *cosmos*) as its frame. No matter how this space is named, it is the value attached to it which matters. Yet recently, networks and cosmopolitanism underwent some interesting criticism.

Networks can be unequal, it is said: certain knots, stronger than others, might exercise power over the rest; there might be parts of a network which don't mind breaking it, to build another one in order to guarantee themselves the possibility of manoeuvring.

The network may become an end in itself losing sight of a movement forward, of change and transformation, which were its goals in the beginning. Networking can become a tool to preserve the existing situation, using reciprocal control as a means for not moving. Most of all, it might support the illusion of being able to control the "whole", forgetting the empty spaces in between its knots, falling back into the ancient image of the net with a handle to be thrown on reality in order to capture something. I prefer to think of the network as immersed in a stream, which means that there is a certain amount of uncertainty and surprise we should always be ready to face. The good network is not a safety net.

Furthermore, «Global networks can provoke reactions which can paradoxically be narrowing instead of broadening the borders of

communities (although they might be trans-national): fundamentalism, terrorism, etc., cross national borders in order to strengthen other borders ("clash of civilization theory" does the same)» (Beck, 2003: 61). Ulrich Beck suggests therefore to be cautious and see cosmopolitization (or the creation of transnational public spheres and spaces) as dialectics of conflict: networks do not erase conflicts. (It might be interesting, here, to understand which conflicts women's networks must face and engage in).

Generation gap is also often one source of discontent. There is a sense and perception of having frozen a whole generation of "transnational women/feminists" in those spaces, so that little room was left for new comers (to face this, a big organization like AWID gives seminars for young women on how to access money for women's rights campaigns).

Again, they are said to be elitist in nature, not representative, disconnected from any reality; dis-embedded. Advocates and practitioners of border crossing (or cosmopolitanism) might become cosmocrats, we are told. Cosmopolitan elites have always been looked at with suspicion, as made of superficial, snobbish personalities not capable of true, deep commitment.

On the other hand, if we ask: which kind of individuals are those who take part to feminist transnational networks, we might find out that they might come, in theory, from all paths of life, according to the type of network. But also that in the long run, they are shaped as "different": they become cosmopolitans, those individuals who have «the ability to stand outside of having one's life written and scripted by any one community, whether that of faith or tradition, religion or culture, and become able to draw selectively on a variety of discursive meanings.»¹⁸

We see global networks as constituted by dynamic and flexible types of connection between individuals, groups or organizations that span the world. [...] This has vast implications for the way we understand the world and how it is governed [...] The once clear cut separation between the domestic sphere of national life and the external or international sphere has largely broken down. Transnational processes present profound challenges and opportunities to states, corporations, cities and territorially based

¹⁸ Vertovec identifies four types of cosmopolitanism: (1) Sociocultural/consumption of "alterity"; (2) Philosophic (Communitarians or Cosmopolitans), which might clash with patriotism; (3) as a Political Project, aimed at building transnational institutions, a new political subject which puts the global at the heart of its political imagination, action, and organization; (4) as an Attitude, a competence which can be used professionally. The Journal "Global Networks", edited by Steve Vertovec with Alistair Rogers and Robin Cohen, published by Blackwell, is one of the richest sources of studies and discussions on these issues.

actors of all kinds. (Rogers et al., 2001: 1-2)

Which introduces *the positive aspects* of net-working which must be reminded.

Networks meet a double desire. The desire of being a knot in it: not to be overwhelmed by the stream, to have a place, not to be captured in some other unwanted network, the desire to exist and resist; and the desire of linking oneself to others, of bonding, of belonging, of being recognized and indispensable: to accommodate together autonomy and linking¹⁹.

Another positive aspect of networks is that they stimulate reflections on issues which used to be taken for granted or solved once for all by analysis of history and societies.

We are invited, from time to time, to look for answers concerning alliances, commonalities, efficacy and to ask other even more basic and apparently naïve questions.

From naïve questions to philosophy

As an example of a basic, naïve question first of all: what do we share, collectively, as women? We generally ask questions of this kind only if and when we face some kind of dilemma. Dilemmas produced by experience because it has be-ried a trusty positive attitude (“I thought we did share a lot, as women....but then....”) or because it has opened a space of sharing where we didn’t expect to celebrate commonalities and closeness. In both cases, these are experiences which don’t happen by chance, but only if one is tuned to accept them. In other words, if there are questions in the air such as: do we actually care about knowing whether we share something as women and what it is? And, if we do, why do we care?

These questions have a completely different meaning if we ask them on a theoretical level (philosophical, anthropological, sociological, etc.) or if we do it because we are involved in some sort of *action* or *practice* which has a beginning, a development and goals and ends. An action which will produce consequences in our lives and in the lives of others. Therefore, the third question to keep in mind will be: do we draw consequences in our lives, suggestions for politically effective action, from the answers? What happens if and when we recognize that we do share something with other women,

¹⁹ In the social network theory, society is seen and studied as network of relations more or less wide and structured. The principle is that each individual (or Actor) relates to others and this interaction shapes the behaviour of both.

even across the borders of nations, cultures, religions, social classes, generations? What if we fail? What if we don't care at all?

Networking, in other words, is a conscious intentional activity, as it is the building of partnerships; it can have intentional political aims or not, but it always requires in-depth work as that suggested by the questions we just asked above.

A philosophical interlude

On the other hand, we should also notice that the metaphor of the net and network were built on the solid ground of philosophical re thinking of issues such as "what is meant by a subject", what relates humans to one another?

The way we conceive ourselves as "subjects", as an "I" and a "We" has also changed. Philosophers and some political theorists (mainly women, as Judith Butler and others) see our "I" no more as an individual closed in itself, isolated, only looking for in-dependence from others, but more and more as an "open" subject: an individual who is conscious of her being dependent on others, being open to the "you"; whose wisdom lies in discovering that "she has always been, from the beginning, a creature exposed and vulnerable, and that the same is true for the other. We might come to the conclusion that may be there is nothing wrong with this interdependence, although it can threaten classical concepts of autonomy and freedom. "[...] the "you" as singular pronoun, comes before the "you" plural, before the "we", before "they" [...] When the "I" tries to refer to the self, may very well start from "herself", but to discover soon that the self is already embedded in a social timeline which is larger than one's capacity of self description [...]"²⁰. An echo of another philosopher's words: "the other's vulnerability and exposure are the first ethic appeal addressed to me. We are necessarily beings who are exposed to one another, because we are vulnerable"²¹.

It is clear that, if we think of ourselves this way (and it has been feminism which worked on these shifts in meanings) then the network is, first of all, a photography of reality and, secondly, it is the only possible way to think and practice intentional bonding and linking up with others.

The network becomes therefore the right metaphor for a different way of

²⁰This argument is developed by the Italian feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero in all her work on the epistemology of relational communication among women and is widely quoted by Judith Butler in her recent essays on ethics and knowledge (Cavarero, 1997; Butler, 2005)

conceiving a subject (a way to answer to the question “who am I?” I am at the crossroad, a knot in a net). With this new meaning, one cannot be inside or outside the net: one is the net, whether you want it or not. There are promises of equality and interdependence in this kind of net even before it becomes a net-work.

But here we have to stress a distinction between the Nets we are in (whether we want it or not, which we practice, consciously sometimes but not necessarily, as Ruba Salih shows) and the net-works which we create intentionally.

To summarize what we have said so far: we are always linked in a net, there are parts of the net which we don't control, others we don't even know about. Of some parts we can only acquire consciousness, but there are others which we actively want to imagine, to create, to draw knowing that whatever we do, we are acting with others, in the presence of others.

Women connected

Is it actually true that being women connects “naturally”, socially, culturally, historically to other women? Personally I would give a positive answer to this question, but I also think that it is far from having been accepted at the theoretical level (one or many different patriarchies?) and even farther from being considered as desirable at the experiential level, as something in which to invest time and energies. Knowing that this link exists might instead generate fear and a need to distance oneself from the others. Conflicts among women start with mother-daughter relationships, sisters to sisters, (sisterhood is neither global nor local, we know that by now) and develop throughout political, public lives. If all this matters when discussing networks, it is at least on two levels: the first is the construction of strategies and identification of goals across “borders” (any border); the second level refers to the quality of the relationships between the knots of a net and often inside each knot.

We know that special places have been created to carry on the first activity. U.N. machineries used to involve selected networks of women every five years or more as Bianca Pomeranzi tells us, in an effort to design “forward looking strategies” shared by all governments, suggested by movements and NGOs, streamlined in officially signed documents. We also know that over the decades this process has become more and more bureaucratized, elitist and ineffective. Which should stimulate more attention to other transnational public spaces, if it is true that there are still, here and there, groups of women committed to change and transformation, convinced that the world would be

a better place if the dominance of males over females, in any form, will be redressed.

Here we come to the networking.

When discussing networking among women, I believe that it is impossible to avoid looking into what has been named (often using it as a fetish word) the *relationship* among different individuals and their different backgrounds. The reason why this is such a central issue to focus on is not that women are more open to the management of personal, affective bonds (being skilled in caring or seductive behaviours). Rather, that the choice of action (not to be confused with “activism”) by women, when it is aimed at changing and transforming the spaces (private, public, symbolic and even physical) assigned to them in all layers of any society, involves the whole of one's being in one's world and, first of all, needs to be nourished by recognition; wants to be mirrored by others' eyes, listened to by other's ears etc., which does not mean that dissonance is not allowed, but that it is a signal of a need for additional understanding and for the tuning of different voices in such a way that some sort of polyphony may be achieved. This might sound like an emotional appeal to “togetherness” as involving face to face relationships, bodies, voices, mirroring, etc.: and in fact this is what it is, but not only, and not for superficial reasons. What is at stake, is the very nature of what is called political public action and the need to transform it, not just by including women as such, but by questioning the roots of its invention and development as a specialized space vis-à-vis other spaces, thoughts, skills which were labeled as non public and non political *because* inhabited by women.

But it is high time to go to the ground and look for some example and experience of what we are trying to show.

A story with some important implications

Here we are discussing women's networking referring to the Middle East, in particular. During the past seven years I happened to travel to the Middle East at least three times a year, gradually involving myself in “women's projects”. I also went there a few times as member of solidarity groups, some of them made of women only.

In the biographies of development projects by and for women there is no necessary reference to networking. The themes or issues on which aid is mobilized are chosen on the basis of policies which are shaped inside national or international institutions. Although there should be a common

frame of policies and guidelines for all actors involved in a project, things happen slightly differently, within some sort of division of tasks. Deciding whether to support a family planning campaign or a credit scheme for women entrepreneurs or both, is up to expert staff and foreign policies guidelines or, if it is the case, to the authorized NGOs. On the other side, designing short term or long terms plans, programs or projects for the “advancement of women” should be up to the “recipient”. The space for negotiation and agreement, for the coming together of “donors” and “beneficiaries” is imagined as neutral; as for the time, both sides seem to wish to reduce it to the minimum necessary to sign contracts and memorandums of understanding. Choices are informed and oriented by specialized expertise, of course: which means that they come after in-depth feasibility studies have been carried out and all the existing literature consulted. A fairly wide range of possible choices for women’s “empowerment” or “advancement” is on the floor for both sides to make a choice. A vast amount of literature commenting debates, experiences, case studies and theories is available in the many development studies’ institutes and institutions around the world, while experts are perfectly aware of how much external and internal forces and contingencies will influence the decisions.

I don’t discuss this interesting subject now. What I try to understand, here, is how (and whether) this level of decision making is connected with the development of bonds, links and communication between women of the two (or more) respective locations (besides the ones strictly involved in the technical procedures of the projects’ lives). The answer is: in no way, or not necessarily. Yet, in my experience, I couldn’t help looking for some way out which could allow to convey “voices” from one place to the other (in this particular case, from Palestine to Italy and vice versa).

There were several reasons, I discovered, for this almost obsessive search and many good reasons for its (not inevitable) failure. Women living in Palestine are bearers of stories and are witnesses of a history which is cancelled from most sources of information. Although this is true for women living anywhere, here we face a multiple responsibility about our ignorance of what it is like *Living Palestine* – to borrow the title of a recent book²². I am referring to that concentration of intractable meanings which are entangled in any representation of that area of the world: not just a matter of conflict and violence, but much more: victimization, evil, justice, constructions of the enemy, racism, ethnicity, contested landscapes, divided memories, guilt and blame, religions and almost all the possible clashes and

²² Lisa Taraki (ed.) (2006) *Living Palestine*, Syracuse University Press.

divides along with impotence and a general lack of skills in disentangling these and other knots. These are issues which stay in the backstage of everyday lives for anybody, women and men, living in Europe or elsewhere, just as other themes which are at the front door of millions, disappear from the eyes of many: poverty, desertification, privatization of common goods, "culture crimes", gynophobia and femicides, just to quote the "horrors" which can be connected to different landscapes, including those which host the lives of the rich and privileged.

One wonders how the scene might look like if seen through women's eyes, just to discover that the huge amount of information, analysis, denunciations have silenced voices and cancelled the multiplicity of bodies and faces, along with the actions they perform in order to change their situation, solve problems and redress violations. Women acting inside their worlds, surviving and weaving bonds, claiming and re-claiming, are pictured, far from their homes, as lifeless stereotypes: puppets performing the roles of Muslims, resistants, victims, etc., on a stage which is looked at, consumed as a spectacle, albeit a spectacle of suffering. In each region of the world there are women who produce knowledge, art and different forms of political association, which bring to the front priorities different from those faced in other places. Knowing about them is certainly possible through all sorts of sophisticated and "friendly" media. The problem is that the kind of knowledge people can access, wherever they are located, on any other physically distant place, is not such as to suggest closeness, commitment, action or the establishment of political alliances.

What I discovered is a strange contradiction. On one hand, to know that the ingredients of any transnational policy (and politics) become real and active, come to life out of the headlines of documents and treaties, only locally, and only when choices are made like in choosing whether to fund wells or clinics or both. On the other hand, to know as well that when this happens, nobody is around, except for few "insiders". To close the circle, we find that being an insider does not allow to act outside, unless one moves to another space and place (or public sphere) which is framed as something different. It can be the sphere of solidarity or of transnational feminist circles, which do not allow political choices at the crossroads between different women's worlds, but do allow a variety of other activities and forms of knowledge production: here one can cultivate and develop empathy, dialogue, mutual curiosity, mutual listening and even planning for some kind of activity: campaigns or collective writing, trans-national research or art works; but all this world of lively exchanges is kept at a security distance from where politics is done at trans or international levels.

In other words, when you come close to the decision making which affects

many, you are in the company of very few (and, furthermore quite often you are not even in the position of making any decision, but only to assist). On the other hand, when you establish the sort of relationships which allow discussions on differences and, even more, mobilize *insights* – meant literally as the capacity to look inside (homes, selves, places, minds) – you might bet that you are not sitting at the top levels of political decision making.

All this should have been quite obvious and not surprising at all, if it were not for the feminist vision which had promised the power of transformation through dialogue and insights, through face to face relationships and the broadening of one's experience through other women's worlds. It is a due comment to say now that there have been (and surely there still are) women who have tried to overcome this dichotomy and different understandings of "power", but the task is still there to be accomplished.

In my search for channels of mutual communication, I was perhaps fighting against wind mills and knocking at the wrong doors, but I did learn some lessons. First of all that one good thing about programs and projects is that they unveil a number of illusions. For instance we might discover that the women evoked in the programs' texts do not really exist; the needs assessed and re-assessed, listed in separate rows as felt or unfelt needs, etc., once captured into the frame of a project, acquire the particular power of fictions which might and might not have some meaningful relationship with reality. In other words, «Development projects – *always unforeseeable* – become real through the work of generating and translating interests, creating context by tying in supporters and so sustaining interpretations» (Mosse, 2005: 15). Here comes the interesting part. Networks are, from this perspective, the flesh and blood of the social life of any project: they are there *not* because there has been a plan to establish or to involve them as implementers of a project, but might be there because they literally come to life in the process which was only triggered or made visible by the trans-national agreement. What comes to life is a net of:

Heterogeneous entities – people, ideas, interests, events and objects (seeds, structures, pumps, computers or database) – [...] tied together by a translation of one kind or another into the material and conceptual order of a successful project [...] So, the coherence attributed to a successful project is never a priori never a matter of design or of policy. (Lewis and Mosse, 2006: 14)

What I find fascinating in this perspective is that it opens up those spaces in which decisions are made; it shows that what is real about decisions (and programs and projects) is not what is signed between two partners in their

isolated rooms, but what happens next. This means that innumerable bridges are thrown while real people, women in this case, become actors reaching out to accomplish something. Going one step further, it is possible to imagine that the “project” is situated well beyond any actual document establishing objectives, activities and the relative budget lines. The networks which may (or may not) be brought to life, are nothing less than those links of interdependency we mentioned in our philosophical interlude; namely, in this case, those links which show the similarities of women's lives wherever they are located. Any action taken by women “as such” might then very well be seen as relevant to any other woman anywhere.

The responsibility I mentioned, in this case, refers to the actions performed by women in Palestine. It might sound a bit mystical as an explanation of networking across borders, but it might work.

Solidarity

Going back to where we started from, we look at the other stream of possible networking between women across national borders: that of solidarity and the types of relationship it may promote.

What about the capacity to transfer these relationships on another level: the one of a – common – commitment to justice? Here lies a crucial issue: we shall go back to it.

For the time being, let us remember that *solidarity* is a key word here, but, as soon as we utter the word, we face again the problem not only of knowing what it means, but also, under which conditions people/women, in particular; are moved to act within the frameworks of seeking justice and practicing solidarity.

Here we are not dealing with money, but with a different kind of “giving”: “We give support to your cause, we give compassion for your pain”. What does that mean? A breach in the sense of justice was perpetrated. Not here, but somewhere, at a distance. It happens but I am not there: there is a subtle intuition in the choice of “going there” made by many women (as the Women in Black). The nature of *empathy*, the loss of bonds, the distance which is induced also by ideologies which were imposing a sort of knowledge deaf to difference, to individual bodies. Another kind of knowledge.

In theory, a feminist approach to “the Middle East” should provide a revolutionary vision: women's common interest across conflicting parties discuss and overturn their patriarchal hierarchies; women's opposition will

produce the knowledge of those who can, must distance themselves from mainstream politics. The capacity to see the tragedy of the coexistence of good and evil; the pervasive cultural psychological poisons of acts of oppression, racism, humiliation in affecting not only the victims, but also the perpetrators; the importance of face to face relationship, recognizing common humanity, distinguishing the individuals and groups from the abstract “nation”, etc.: all this might be the core of a feminist approach. *In reality* to involve large numbers of women in Italy on these issues, which concern the whole world, is not an easy task.

We might advocate the claim of justice as common good, but we shall have to tackle the different, opposing interpretations of what is meant by it, in the particular case of the Middle East conflict.

What is at stake, after all, is all that we mentioned above, plus the possibility of taking *responsibility*, of reacting, responding to the very basic fact that somebody is in pain, a wound in the common sense of justice was opened. An opportunity to produce a different knowledge based on experience and otherness.

Of course, we should remember that differences and conflicts can be played on the stage of a public arena along the lines of political confrontations between different and opposing projects, which don't need to carry traces of the troublesome complexities of cultures, individuals, attitudes, biographies, positionalities. Togetherness, we might go on, belongs to the realm of means when it comes to politics or, otherwise, to the sphere of private behaviours.

Yet, if the challenge of distance, difference and conflict, is taken as an opportunity to look into the unexamined assumption that women who act “as such” should share interests, goals and ways of thinking and behaving; then distance can become an asset, an inspiration for acting and moving, temporarily, away from one's home.

In other words, we might support the assumption that, when distance among would-be partners is more visible (because it is imbedded in space – geography – or history, language, culture, etc.), and therefore more challenging, there are better chances to explore the nature and the whereabouts of a relationship. Unfortunately, these opportunities are seldom caught.

Going eastward we have to face the struggle against the ways the conflict is represented here.

We might come to the conclusion that for us, here, whether we engage in cooperation or in solidarity movements (facing in each case specific themes) towards women in the Middle East, we shall at least have to set ourselves

two goals: changing the representation of the conflict and “gendering” the conflict – i.e. showing the links and continuum of domestic and public violence, the competence women have gained on this.

If we have to answer now to the question “What is a good network?”, we might answer that it is a framework of different partnerships. If Partnership is a dual relationship, we know that they are necessary, but also that they gain strength and meaning only if they melt into networks.

A good network then, is one which supports partnerships inside itself; allows multilevel knowledge and experience (knowledge of solidarity, of development, of political alliances); links not only different agents, but different parts of our life experience; regulates competition, develops conflict resolution skills (among its members, first of all); discovers and deposits as acquired and transmissible, knowledge about all this; and guarantees continuity of the whole doing. All this in public and ready to share its story and future with others.

But a network is also a “home”, a temporary dwelling which can shelter and restore the energies and beauty of individual and common visions: no matter if they will not come into being.

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Troubles and promises of transnational women's networking across the Mediterranean

Ruba Salih

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on a politically and culturally neglected aspect of contemporary migration in Europe, that is the role of women in the diasporas in forging transnational public spheres. After a section in which I engage with the analysis of how transnationalism challenges old perceptions of membership and citizenship, I will focus on different experiences of networking among Middle Eastern women residing in the diaspora, especially in Europe, and feminist and women activists back in countries of origin. Focusing on Kurdish, North African and Iranian women's attempt to establish transnational networks, the paper will show that transnational public spheres engendered by women activists across borders have enormous political potentials and push us to question classic modernist notions about membership, loyalties, and citizenship from a gender perspective. However, a closer examination of some experiences of "networking" across borders reveals how this is a complex terrain which could produce empowering effects but does not eradicate asymmetries altogether.

On transnationalism and diaspora

Transnationalism and diaspora have emerged in the last fifteen years as powerful new paradigms through which to understand contemporary social, cultural and political transformation affecting migrants and the societies where they live. Together with the extraordinary changes in technologies of travel and communication, multiculturalism and the emphasis on "cultural differences" may have played an important role in forging transnational and diasporic attachments. Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc, three

anthropologists who had spent many years researching Vincentian, Grenadian, Haitian and Filipino transnational communities in a global city (New York) provided a pioneering definition of transmigrants as «[...] a new kind of migrating population [...] composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field» (1992: 1).

The main points were that:

- *Transnational migration is inextricably linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism and must be analysed within the context of global relations between capital and labour;*
- *Transnationalism is a process by which migrants, through their daily activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries;*
- *Bounded social science concepts that conflate physical location, culture, and identity can limit the ability of researchers first to perceive and then to analyse the phenomenon of transnationalism;*
- *By living their lives across borders, transmigrants find themselves confronted with and engaged in the nation-building processes of two or more nation-states. Their identities and practices are configured by hegemonic categories, such as race and ethnicity, that are deeply embedded in the nation building processes of these nation-states* (Basch et al., 1994: 22).

Transnational approaches, by stressing social, economic and political fields that crosscut national boundaries, have forged new ways of studying migration and migrants beyond bounded relations to one place (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), revealing their lives in a more complex light. The conceptualisation of migration in transnational terms allows an understanding of migrants as no longer caught in the trap of having to stand between either assimilation or nostalgia and the “myth of return” (Anwar, 1979). Rather, migrants seem to be more and more able to construct their lives and maintain their membership in two or more countries.

From another direction, the focus on migrants’ ability to be both “here” and “there”, crossing geographical and political boundaries, implied the revision of old terms such as diaspora (in different ways: Anthias, 1998; Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990; Hovanessian, 1998). Moreover, through the study of diasporic communities composed of individuals who «have collective homes away from home»

(Clifford, 1994: 308), migrants had become icons of hybridity and, through the metaphor of “border crossing”, the symbol of liberatory articulations between place, culture and identity (Clifford, 1997). Living in a diaspora resulted in a “double consciousness” (Gilroy, 1993) where individuals’ identities are produced through breaking boundaries and challenging fixity.

There have also been radical changes in the social, economic and demographic domains which have shaped the “new migration to Europe” and elsewhere. The shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist industrial production, the move from a multinational to a transnational flexible system of accumulation (Harvey, 1989), the withering away of the state from welfare systems and other domains, the gap in the demographic configurations of Western countries with respect to the rest of the world, and finally the transformation of the technology of information and communication (Castells, 1996) are some of the salient features of this epoch which impinge upon the character of contemporary migration.

Indeed, there is overwhelming consensus on the fact that the general crisis of the nation-state, in cultural, economic and institutional terms, may be seen as both a cause and a consequence of transnational forms of lives. Central in the current impasse of the nation state is the challenge that transnationalism brings to one of the key structures of the modern national state, that is a unitary and homogenous cultural and religious identity anchored to a territory as a key access to citizenship. Transnationalism could be metaphorically seen as a dimension of life across borders, under certain circumstances taking the shape of a form of refusal of the assimilation to a national state, and simultaneously it is a strategy aiming at fighting against or containing the exclusionary effects of the fortification of barriers and boundaries. In this sense, the transnational dimension of migration could be seen as a sort of “third space”, to borrow from the well-known metaphor of Homi Bhabha with regard to post-colonial identities, where subjects detain a form of power which takes the shape of resistance to both exclusion and assimilation.

Transnationalism is not only a “lived experience” but it has operated as a theoretical device which has had the merit of challenging what has been denoted as a “methodological nationalism” within the modern social sciences, which have generally tended to perceive and therefore to reproduce the boundaries of the nation-state as the main socio-spatial contexts where economic, cultural, political and social processes occur (Vertovec, 1999).

Migrants, diasporas and their demand for cultural recognition together with the new post-national character of plural societies are increasingly celebrated as expressions of the end of the national character of the state. According to

some scholars (see for example, Soysal 1994) post-war immigration policies in many European countries have de facto challenged the national character of citizenship. On the one hand, migrants in Europe have been increasingly granted social, civil and some kinds of political rights that render them post-national citizens. Moreover, the nation-state, while controlling the organisational aspects of these rights, is not anymore the sole authority on which the granting of such rights depends. For example, transnational and international organisations and universalistic appeal to human rights constitute new arenas wherein rights are increasingly demanded and membership defined (Soysal, 1999).

Transnationalism is a multidimensional phenomenon which differs, among other variables such as class, religion, ethnicity also most importantly, according to generation and gender. We should be able to see the different ways of being and belonging to transnational fields and address the implications of these diversities for a reformulation of citizenship. Transnationalism could refer to a dimension of life which cuts across borders mainly by way of recurrent physical returns to migrants' countries of origin. First generation transnational relations may represent a way to optimize symbolic, economic and social resources across countries for migrant women and their families in a context of material and legal precariousness (Salih, 2003), or may be a strategy of flexible accumulation of resources and status, which ends in a flexible citizenship (Ong, 1999). These may involve the construction of transnational religious spaces (Mandaville, 2003), transnational ritual spaces (Salih, 2002), transnational kinship relations (Fog Olwig, 1993), transnational trade spaces (Riccio, 2001), or even transnational political spaces. We should not, however, think about transnationalism as always entailing acts of resistance towards the nation-state. It is crucial to grasp the ongoing power relations underpinning the formation and reproduction of states, capitals, and gendered identities. Women, for example, get sometimes trapped into a transnational sphere of reproductive activities, since their gendered roles require them to actually engage in continuous transnational movements to care for their transnational families. Migrant women who are often busy, working in the reproductive and care sector with European families, need their female relatives to take care of their children. Grandmothers end up traveling between Europe and the countries of origin to take their grandchildren, becoming the invisible actors of a transnational sphere of reproduction and caring.

But, as already noted, transnationalism does not always involve physical movements or returns. It could also refer to identities, loyalties and affiliations which extend beyond national or local borders. For example, the identification with a global community of Muslims, also facilitated by new

technologies of communication, could give birth to a transnational imagined community of Muslims around the world.

In this context, what seems to have gained prominent attention in the debate about transnationalism, after the first rather celebratory atmosphere that reigned in the course of the nineties amongst transnational scholars, are issues related to the links between transnationalism, incorporation and strategies or practices of citizenship at local and national levels. Indeed, while earlier scholars, also wishing to counteract the methodological nationalism that dominated much of the social sciences, tended to emphasise that transnationalism was a form of resistance to nation-states hegemonic practices, more recently scholars have been engaged in demonstrating that transnational ways of being and belonging are not, in principle, incompatible with some kind of incorporation into the receiving society. Rather the opposite: for many migrants and their offspring, transnationalism could also emerge or assume a different form, as a consequence of stability and integration in Europe. Moreover, transnationalism could also be supported or even fostered by many sending states, who may be willing to promote “diasporic” policies in order to capitalise on their diasporas, by favouring simultaneous incorporations to their nationals abroad at various levels.

Glick Schiller and Levitt (2004) argued that the aim of transnational migration scholarship should now lie in the “reformulation of the concept of society”, since transnationalism challenges basic institutions such as the family, citizenship and the nation-states. National boundaries are indeed bypassed, crossed and extended by the lives of transnational migrants. However, the “incorporation of individuals into nation-states and transnational connections are not contradictory social processes. Simultaneity is a possibility that needs to be theorized and explored”.

Transnational public spheres

The transnational dimension of migration, with its emphasis on migrants’ simultaneous engagement in two or more countries, makes it evident that many contemporary migrants do not wish to assimilate to the host nation, neither do they wish to return permanently to their country of origin. Rather, they develop loyalties, identities and political cultures which cross cut boundaries and which strike a challenge to the classical conceptualisations on which the nation-state is based. Identity politics and transnational affiliations challenge the classic notion of citizenship by questioning the presumed principle that to be a citizen one should also be a national of the country in which she or he resides. This has also several effects on the public

sphere which could not anymore be conceived of as a nationally bounded space of communication. As Nancy Fraser puts it, a key disjuncture in the current crisis of the nationally bounded notion of the public sphere is represented by «the mismatch of scale between Westphalian-state-based citizenship, post-Westphalian communities of fate or risk (some of which are global), national and transnational (but subglobal) publics, and subglobal solidarities. Overcoming this mismatch requires institutionalising elements of transnational, quasi-global citizenship; generating concomitantly broad solidarities that cross divisions of language, ethnicity, religion and nationality; and constructing broadly inclusive public spheres in which common interests can be created and discovered through open democratic communication.» (2005)

Migrant Women and the building of transnational public spheres

So far, it has been argued that transnational identities question the classical conceptualisations on which the nation-state is based. A nationally bounded notion of the public sphere is also subject to question when confronted with transnational practices, identities, mobilization and spaces of communication engendered by diasporic political subjectivities. As Nancy Fraser also notes: «The idea of a national citizenry which was supposed to be the subject of public sphere communication is today challenged by transnational identities, binational citizens, migration and identity politics, multiple residency scheme, flexible models of citizenship [...]». In this context, communication «can no longer serve its classic function of mobilizing those who constitute a “community of fate” to assert democratic control over the powers that determine the basic conditions of their lives» in that «not only do that powers reside elsewhere but those affected by them do not constitute a political community.» (2005: 4).

National citizenship is not only challenged by Muslim religious identities, although these are definitively the object of most contentions in Europe. Classic notions of citizenship are being challenged by new transnational ways of conceiving of membership which are expressed through transnational political mobilization. Indeed, there are increasing examples of a mobilization in transnational arenas, carried out not only by men, as typically the literature on long distance nationalism has shown, but also by minority women, especially although not certainly exclusively, young women of Muslim origin in Europe. For example, women from Islamic background, albeit from diverse political standpoints, contribute to create public arenas for discussing women's discrimination by taking into account the local, national and transnational scales that produce their legal, social and

cultural conditions. In addition, women promote transnational public spheres aimed at discussing the conditions that sustain their discrimination, the ways to change their predicaments, the possibility of developing new political gendered subjects with the aim of challenging gender subordination. In the next section I will discuss some attempts to develop transnational forms of mobilization and show what are the main challenges that these attempts encountered as well as the main results that Middle Eastern women in the diaspora and in the countries of origin achieved through transnational forms of mobilization, networking and partnership. Of course, these terms denote diverse political practices and in the course of the paper I will try to beware of the implications of creating a partnership rather than a transnational mobilization.

Moroccan women in the diaspora and the reform of the Mudawwana

The year 2004 was marked by a salient event in the Maghreb: the reform of the Moroccan Personal Status law, *Mudawwana*, after more than fifteen years' mobilization by Moroccan feminists. The reform restricted polygamy, gave women access to more rights in the domain of children custody and divorce, and abolished the institution of women's guardianship, *wali*. Although systematic studies have not yet been conducted on the role of the Moroccan diaspora in shaping political processes back home, there has been some evidence that the mobilization in favour of the Reform of the Family Code took place also in the diaspora, amongst those women, first and second generation, who have managed to enter the European political arenas at various local, national or European levels (see Buskens, 2003: 105, on the mobilization of Moroccans in the Netherlands).

Women of the diaspora were concerned with the reform because most women who live in Europe are actually leading transnational lives, either by way of recurrent physical returns and/or by virtue of maintaining their Moroccan citizenship along with the host country's one. Moroccan women in the diaspora are thus involved in processes and practices of simultaneous incorporation at various levels and are aware of the importance of lobbying for their rights both as minorities and as women. It is within this context that Moroccan women developed a transnational public sphere through the initiative of the "Moroccan women from Morocco and abroad". In September 2003 the group organised a conference around the issue of the reform of the Mudawwana, which saw the participation of Moroccan women from Belgium, France, Holland, Switzerland, England, Corsica, Canada, the USA, Germany and Spain, in addition to Morocco, and was organised by

CIOFEM (Moroccan Women Information and Observation Centre) working under the umbrella of LDDF (Democratic League for Women's Rights). The conference outcomes emphasised the dilemmas that Moroccan men and women are confronted with in their daily life in Europe because of the conflicts between the laws in their countries of origin and residence, especially when it comes to personal status codes.

Recommendations from the conference included the proposal to apply the law of the domicile to all Moroccans residing abroad – following a law that was passed in Spain in March 2003 – and the promotion of a campaign aiming at training Moroccans abroad on women's rights and duties in mixed marriages or same nationality marriages alike. The conference participants advocated the setting up of a network of Moroccan Women from Morocco and Abroad, which will coordinate action and information through action plans in each country as well as at the regional and international levels.

After the reform has been adopted, women in the diaspora are getting even further in the development of a transnational public sphere. Indeed, the mobilization of Moroccan women did not end with the reform of the *Mudawwana*. On the contrary: women continued to publicly discuss the effects and the implementation of the reform on their daily life in the diaspora, urged to do so by the transnational dimension of their lives. It is not uncommon, for example in a country such as Italy, which became recently an immigration country, to attend public events promoted by Arab women living in the diaspora. One such example I would like to provide in the context of this paper relates to a public conference held in Turin in 2006 on the effects of the reform of the *Mudawwana* on Moroccan women in Italy and France. The conference took place in a well known "migrant and native women's centre" in Turin, north Italy. The keynote speakers were two young women of Moroccan origin, both in the course of obtaining their PhDs from a very prestigious European university on subjects related to women and rights in the diaspora and at home. From what one could gather at a first glance, speakers and audience showed different orientations towards Islam. For example, one speaker wore a *hijab* while the other did not. One of the talks was devoted to spread the results of a research project undertaken in the north of Italy on the effects of the reform of the Moroccan personal status law on migrant women, while the other talk was actually emphasising women's achievements through the reform, but also the discrimination women have to face due to the obstacles in implementing the reform itself. Part of the presentation was illustrating the particular predicament of women of Moroccan origin in France, who face multiple problems due to the existing gap between French and Moroccan codes with regard to family law. The presenter concluded by auspicing a greater political power of the

Moroccan residents abroad in their country origin and proposing a “European code of Arab Muslim law” for the Arab diasporas residing in Europe.

Among the audience several women took the floor. Most of the women worked as intercultural mediators with Arab Muslim and migrant women in different towns in northern Italy. In particular, two women wearing hijabs joined very passionately into the discussion contending that the reform of the Mudawwana is just a cosmetic intervention addressed to the western world which does not solve women's discrimination. They described the situation of women who «have been suffering for more than eight years to get the divorce... these are women who often have met a new and real love in their life, some went to live with Italian men from whom they also had children: but how are considered these children in the new Mudawwana?» concluded bitterly the woman.

In the audience was also sitting Yasmina, (a fictitious name) whom I had met other times before. She is a young university student of Moroccan origin, she also wears a hijab and she is an active practicing Muslim. She partakes in several organizations and associations at local, national and transnational levels. She has just been appointed as a member of a recently created national consultative body “Consulta giovanile per il pluralismo culturale e religioso” (*Youth consultative body for cultural and religious pluralism*) created by the new ministry of interior who is in the process of consulting with various religious and non religious constituencies to elaborate a new national law on religious freedom. Yasmina is a prominent member of both the local branch and the national body of “Giovani Musulmani d'Italia” (GMI, *Young Muslims of Italy*) and she is an active member of another association called “Giovani senza frontiere” (*Young beyond frontiers*), a secular organization working on issues of human rights and xenophobia where most of the adherents are Italians. She is also an associate of the international (European) organization “Young Women from Minorities” working on gender and ethnicity in Europe. At the local level, she is one of the founders of “Jusur” (*Bridges*), a local organization which applied for funding from the University of Turin in order to provide services, information and help to all the foreign students who arrive in Turin.

These examples witness to an authentic and mounting involvement of several women in the diaspora in a sort of “counterpublic” sphere. As intercultural mediators, as active members of women's associations, as students and prominent figures of local, national and transnational organizations, women became actors in the process of challenging the dominant notion of the public sphere, substantiating Nancy Fraser's argument (2005) about the crisis of the nationally bounded conception of the

public sphere.

The case of Kurdish women in the diaspora and transnational mobilization: troubles of a “borderless” entity

In the following section, I would like to linger over the case of Kurdish women transnational mobilization, which very well epitomizes the paradoxes of being a borderless entity in a political context where not only identities, but also resources and power are highly constrained by national and nationalistic conceptions. This case, as we will see, very well illustrates the dialectic between national constructions, hampering political organizations and strategies, and conditioning their access to political and symbolic resources, and transnational, and in this specific case, also borderless, political subjectivities, striving to promote transnational gendered agendas in the public sphere.

Kurdish women in the diaspora, by virtue of their non-state status and borderless identity, have been at the forefront of transnational feminist mobilization. Mojab and Gorman (2007) analyse the impact that women in the diaspora had on the state-building process in the Kurdish region of northern Iraq and how, in turn, politics within the Kurdish region has affected the political agendas and mobilization in/of the diaspora. Their analyses are based on four different organizations based in Toronto, London and Stockholm as well as organizations working in the region. The organizations were chosen on the basis of their feminist identity and their independence from Kurdish political parties. According to the study, Kurdish women have traditionally been involved in the process of nation-building with a role of peacemakers, exemplified by their mobilization to stop the civil war that erupted in 1994 between the two main political parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

The hegemonic constructions of the host nation-state impinge upon the forms and substance of diaspora women mobilization. In the case of Kurdish women for example, diaspora women's organizations choose to focus or to organize either as feminist or nationalist with an internationalist or nationalist agenda according to the ways they are perceived by the host state. Kurdish women in Turkey cannot mobilize as Kurdish, they are only allowed to organize as feminists. Similarly, Kurdish women in Germany often mobilize as migrant women, because they cannot compete with mainstream male organizations which monopolize most of the funding. Despite the impossibility of discarding the state, and its hegemonic constructions of identities to which minority women have to conform,

Kurdish women have managed to create international gatherings such as the Kurdish Women's Studies Network, where the transnational dimension of these organizations emerges.

The International Kurdish Women's Studies Network was formed in the fall of 1996 and was founded by a number of Kurdish and non-Kurdish women activists and researchers. It is an international body with individual and organizational membership from Europe, North America and the Middle East, «started as a response to a growing need for opening a space for Kurdish women in international debates on women's studies, and promoting gender justice among the Kurdish communities in the diaspora and the Middle East». According to their website²³, the network «provides a forum for exchange of experience and knowledge among those who are interested in and work for improving the lives of Kurdish women; acts as a liaison for community-based, institution-based, academic and independent researchers and activists in all parts of Kurdistan and in the diaspora»; assists those engaged in Kurdish women's studies and activism in all regions of Kurdistan and in the diaspora; «promotes the theories and practices of feminism among the women of Kurdistan and the diaspora; and promotes women's rights and gender equality in Kurdistan».

However, the network ended its short life in 2002 due to the enormous difficulties in establishing itself as a “borderless” entity. For example access to funding from both academic and non-academic entities such as UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) is often tied to national identity anchored to a specific territory, while a diasporic political subjectivity finds it almost impossible to get funded. The non-state status of Kurdish women and communities more generally has thus constituted a major problem in accessing funding, since most organizations should be located in a specific territorially delimited nation-state in order to be recognised. Moreover, allocation of resources goes more easily to “*Third World*-based women's organizations” than to women who are based in Europe.

Kurdish women in the diaspora had to cope with the indifference or sometimes the opposition of Kurdish political parties both in the diaspora and in the Kurdish region. The patriarchal attitude of Kurdish leaders in exile on the one hand and the privilege given to the nationalist cause on the other hand, were amongst the major problems encountered by the Kurdish women in exile. As Mojad and Gorman (2007: 68) underline: «The network had to take position against the patriarchal nationalism of Kurdish political parties and rely instead on its own efforts to establish transnational feminist

²³ <http://www.ww05.org/wows/member/kurdish.html>

solidarity».

Nonetheless, it is interesting to note how being in the diaspora can be an advantage in terms of ability to disengage from conformist and dominant alliances and develop new political transversal positionalities. As a woman activist interviewed by Mojab and Gorman (2007: 72) stated: «I think I am contributing and advocating the plight of Kurdish women more effectively while I am abroad than being in Kurdistan. I am freer here, I do not need to be affiliated with any of the political parties. I have to admit that I am in the diaspora, but in my heart and head I live in Kurdistan every day. I want to know daily what is going on there and what have Kurdish women done. I am in love with Kurdistan and Kurdish women».

However, women's mobilization in the diaspora may involve tackling issues that touch upon women as migrant women facing discrimination from patriarchal communities and from host states as migrants or refugee women. This may involve a very painful experience for those who are in exile who, by focusing on gender issues, may be perceived as traitors eluding the nationalist agenda, and can be accused of prioritizing secondary issues or being manipulated by western powers.

Nevertheless, the work of diaspora women kept being very much focused on gender issues as witnessed by the campaign that was launched against honour killing following a series of murders committed on young women both in the diaspora and in the Kurdish region. The transnational organization Kurdish Women Rights' Watch and particularly the Kurdish Women Action against Honour Killing, which has been active since 2000, were prominent in this regard. These organizations, whose official aim is to support and promote women's interests in the Kurdish communities in Kurdistan and in the diaspora, campaigned and mobilised for the amendments of personal status codes and honour killing legislation in the Kurdish region. The transnational character of their mobilization is witnessed by this statement on their website: «At present it is often difficult to assess the extent of violence against women, and honour-based violence is particularly likely to be concealed or misrepresented. We believe that it is crucial to build up a research base of evidence through reports in the Kurdish and non-Kurdish press. As we have members who speak Kurdish (Sorani and Kurmanji), Arabic, Turkish and Farsi as well as English, we are coordinating the development of an archive of reports to provide information on women's rights in general, and honour-based violence in particular, to be

posted on the website as a permanent record»²⁴.

These diaspora organizations and networks' campaign against honour killing, which aimed also at calling for a Personal Status code amendment in the Kurdish region, ended up being perceived as downplaying the Kurdish government led by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). As usual, they were accused of emphasising or exasperating the issue of honour killing, focusing on the "wrong" thing and shying away from nationalist agendas.

Despite these tensions, diaspora women managed to make an impact on politics "back home" as witnessed by the fact that in 2005 the Kurdish regional government led by the KDP appointed a feminist based in Sweden as advisor for women's affairs to prime minister Barzani. To a question on how a diaspora woman could represent Kurdish women's issues despite having lived in exile for many years, she replied: «I have always worked for Kurdistan even if I have lived abroad. All my work is dedicated for the Kurdish community. Living in Sweden for 13 years has given me a different perspective in terms of writing, reading, and feminist work. Me and my experience will return to Kurdistan and as always I will be working in that line» (Mojab and Gorman, 2007: 76).

Transnational spaces: empowerment or disempowerment? The case of Iranian Women

Other examples of women's construction of a transnational public sphere are reported by Halleh Gorashi and Nayereh Tavakoli (2006)²⁵ in their work on Iranian women from the diaspora and from Iran. These authors are interested in the contested notion of identity within the transnational framework and in the simultaneously enabling and limiting potentials of transnational spaces for Iranian women's movement back in Iran. In the course of the nineties, Iranian women had access to transnational spaces, after more than a decade of closure and isolation due to the Khomeini politics. The new possibilities for Iranian women and activists came from both the new technologies of information and communication such as the Internet and a newly established connection with the Iranian diaspora. During the 80s, Iranian women in the diaspora who left Iran soon after the revolution were very suspicious of the possibility of developing a real civil society in Iran and were perceiving Iranian women from inside Iran as collaborators of the regime. On the other hand, women from inside fought for gaining rights within the constraining

²⁴ Kurdish Women against Honour Killing: www.kwahk.org; Kurdish Women Rights' Watch: www.kwrw.org

²⁵ See also Gorashi, 2004.

limits of the Iranian regime, but managed nevertheless to gain some rights and to improve their predicaments as witnessed by the proliferation of women's magazines, organizations as well as by the ever increasing number of women in universities and professions. However these women activists could not work within a secular framework but had to adapt and negotiate strategically within the discursive limits of an Islamist regime, often defining themselves as Islamic feminists, as opposed to those of the diaspora, who thought that women's rights could not be achieved within a religious framework.

Despite the reciprocal suspicious gazes, Iranian women from Iran and from the diaspora managed to create transnational spaces of mobilization and discussion. One example is the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation (IWSF), whose aim has been to «provide a forum for the exchange of ideas on issues related to Iranian women» (Gorashi and Tavakoli, 2006: 95). The first meeting took place in 1990 at Cambridge followed by an annual meeting that is attended by Iranian women from all over the world and is held in different towns, which so far included the cities of Los Angeles, Berkeley, Denver, Paris, Stockholm, London, Berlin among others. Every year the themes of the conference change. However, this transnational public sphere is not void of conflicts. Rather, every year the meeting is dominated by increasingly deep divergences between activists and scholars on the one hand, and between “secular” and “Islamic” feminists on the other. The cleavages crosscut the diaspora/non-diaspora divide and are concerned with the different political cultures women embody in spite of their geographical locations. For example, one axe of conflict was manifest between Iranian activists living in the diaspora (mainly secular) and the Iranian scholars also living in the diaspora, who began reporting on the work of Iranian women from Iran in terms of “Islamic feminism”. These scholars were accused of being post-modernist and they were verbally attacked in more than one occasion. Similarly, leftist activists from the diaspora perceived successful women invited from Iran to the annual meetings as collaborators to the regime. Gorashi and Tavakoli report on how, during the 2003 conference, when the writing on women's rights in Iran of Mehrangiz Kar – a lawyer and an activist – was awarded the yearly price “woman of the year”, many activists raised their voices against the price on the basis that a woman who is able to work as a lawyer in Iran cannot be trustworthy. The statement of a participant to the meeting they report is worth full quotation:

[...] Those leftists were saying that Mehrangiz Kar is a betrayer, because she had been working with the regime. This is absurd. The only reason for their accusations is that she has been able to work as a lawyer in Iran and has had her own office. For those people,

someone who had stayed in Iran, no matter what that person had been doing, whether that person had been in prison or not, had been raising her voice or not, simply the fact that the person had stayed in Iran is already the symbol of her/his betrayal. (2006: 96)

The cleavages and conflicts reached the higher tension during a conference that was held in Berlin in the year 2000. Leftist Iranian activist from the diaspora interrupted the meeting in protest and prevented the speakers from intervening. A woman and a man improvised a striptease that was endlessly reported on the Iranian broadcast and resulted in the imprisonment of many Iranian scholars and activist upon their return to Iran, accused by a Revolutionary Court in Teheran of having offended Islam and the Islamic republic: some of them are still in prison. According to Gorashi and Tavakoli this event, which resulted in many discussions and reflections among the Iranian in the diaspora, is paradigmatic of the contradictory impacts of transnational mobilization on local activism back in Iran:

...it shows how transnational connections and incidents could be used by the state in order to limit the space for local activism. On the other hand, transnational allies have also proved essential for the support and safeguarding of civil society in Iran. Having access to the transnational space has been crucial for activists in Iran during the past decade. Transnational connections among Iranian NGOs and non Iranian organizations and the organization of Beijing + 5 Women 2000 in Iran were sources of inspiration for local activism. Furthermore, the awarding of the Nobel Prize to Shirin Ebadi brought new self confidence and self-esteem to Iranian women who had fought a twenty-five-year battle to claim their rights and their space. (2006: 97)

Another enabling possibility for women is represented by the increasing use of the Internet and blogs as channels for communication which provide Iranian women from Iran with the possibility to virtually partake in a transnational public sphere, breaking out of both the physical and intellectual isolation to which they are confined by the Islamist conservatives. «Cyberspace has proven crucial in combining the local with the transnational. In fact, it is sometimes the only space that women living in Iran can escape to in order to express themselves freely, to collect information, to reach other, diaspora Iranians, and the rest of the world» (Gorashi and Tavakoli, 2006: 99).

Problematizing transnational feminist networks: towards the dissolution or the creation of new asymmetries ?

In the previous sections I have provided three examples of diaspora women organizing and mobilizing transnationally and highlighted some of the main achievements and critical concerns emerging from such type of mobilization. In this section I want to shift the focus to another type of transnational public sphere and discuss the ways in which asymmetries of power between women across the globe and categories such as “South” and “North” go through a double process of fragmentation and reinforcement in the context of the development of “transnational feminist networks”.

One example is offered by Lilia Labidi (2007) in an essay on the crisis and challenges thwarting the Tunisian feminist movement in its shift from a local national movement to a transnationally oriented network. According to this author, the Tunisian feminist movement is going through a period of transition from «a universalistic feminism based on law to a specific transnational feminism» (2007: 8) which seeks alliances with both international and regional feminist groups. In analysing the transformation of the movement, Labidi shows how this process has empowered women to an extent, but it also had some paradoxical consequences which seriously question the potential of certain types of transnational networks to foster women's autonomy and empowerment. When it comes to the Tunisian feminist movement, as well as other movements in the region, Labidi notes how the possibilities that emerged from creating partnership with European women's organizations and international donors brought to a shortfall of the women's movement autonomy from the state back home. Moreover, though the development of civil society networks and especially gendered networks and projects across the Mediterranean, namely through the notion of “partnership” as pushed forward by the Barcelona process was a crucial element in the achievement of women's agendas, it did not dissolve hierarchies. In fact, this mechanism reproduced old asymmetries and created new ones.

Two critical issues that accompanied this shift are raised by the author. The first revolves around the extent to which «the establishment of a transnational feminism is the product of internal struggles and/or result of geopolitical pressures on the region». Whereas the second demands «What lessons did they learn from their partnership with promoters of the Barcelona process which, while financing activities to advance women's rights in the Mediterranean south, also support Schengen policies that restrict the movement of people from the South to the countries of the North?».

It is true, Labidi underlines, that this shift is what allowed the feminist

movements in the region to achieve their main victories, namely the reform of the Moroccan Mudawwana in 2004 and the delivery given by Ben Ali at the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of the Personal Status Code, when he stated his country's determination to support «all efforts on the regional and international level to propagate the values of equality, solidarity, and modernity [...], to establish a solid basis for a broad Arab renaissance in which men and women share the same responsibilities on an equal basis» (Labidi, 2007: 8). However, these achievements went in parallel with a process of exposing the movement to a new vulnerability, since both in Tunisia and Morocco women lost their independence from the states: «receiving from the state a guarantee that their rights would be protected, they in turn committed themselves to protect the institutions of the state» (Labidi, 2007:26).

Becoming “transnational” also meant that these movements received substantial financial support from international donors such as the EU and this also had serious implications. The crucial role of Morocco as a new buffer zone for Europe and the consequent EU's will to weaken Islamist radical constituencies, were some of the reasons why Moroccan feminist benefited from funding to advance their rights. In this context, the creation of a “transnational feminist network” obscured other more hidden processes at work. Indeed, the women's movement, by partaking in such network, not only paid a high price in terms of political independence from the state, but also paradoxically, the participation to a transnational network obscured or reproduced existing hierarchies of power across women in the globe.

[...] the reform of the Mudawwana, whose success was partly due to the use of modern communications technology, requires significant funds such as few poor countries can afford. This raises the question of how poor women with scant rights might benefit from such support if they do not live in zones of strategic value to the wealthier countries of the North, which may provide support only in response to perceived threats, security or otherwise. (Labidi 2007: 26)

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Networking for new partnership in development cooperation

Bianca Pomeranzi

The state of the art in Gender and International Cooperation

By participating to this seminar, I would like to share my experience as a feminist who's long been working as a gender advisor in the Italian institution for Development cooperation. Right from the start I wish to say that I started this profession after having partaken since 1981 in the history of women's networking which Gabriella Rossetti described, as a feminist and as co-founder of the first Italian women's NGO. It was the early 90s when I took up my current position. At that time, women's networks – especially those coming from the South as the ecofeminist movement or DAWN²⁶ – indeed seemed to have the chance to transform the development concept and the practice of international cooperation through new gendered visions. The Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) was the highest achievement of that era.

Unfortunately, many changes happened since then, and particularly after 9/11 2001 – which is when we started to carry out the Tamkeen program. While keeping into consideration some of the challenging questions raised by Gabriella Rossetti's paper, I therefore wish to explain the background of this program through an account of such major changes from the perspective of a person working within the institutions, who acted as a catalyst to translate into “institutional” practices what women's networks situated in the global South were suggesting. For this purpose, I consider as crucial to share with you both an analysis of the “state of art” of current international cooperation strategies and modalities, as well as an account of the work of the Italian gender and development policies and programs.

First of all, I would like to stimulate some reflections on the current state of international cooperation institutions, whereby the achievement of the eight

²⁶ Development Alternatives with Women for the New Era

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 – ranging from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, to providing universal primary education – constitutes the main framework which gathered the consensus of all the world's countries and leading development institutions. However, today the international community lags far behind the achievement of the MDGs targets, especially for what concerns gender equality and women's empowerment. Over ten years have passed since Beijing Conference; 185 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); UNSCR 1325 and the Millennium Declaration have been adopted. Nonetheless, when it comes to fulfilling promises to advance these goals, women in the UN and in most countries are facing a crisis of implementation and accountability. Whereas the interest to foster gender equality has steadily increased, progress in implementation is affected by continuous under-investment. What is preventing commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment from being translated into concrete actions, investments and changes? What is the overall actual commitment of development institutions?

Launched in 2006 by the OECD/DAC²⁷, the Paris Declaration and a host of new aid modalities are reshaping development partnerships. Unfortunately, insofar as commitments to gender equality, women's empowerment and other globally agreed goals are conspicuously absent from these frameworks, their potential to spearhead more equitable partnerships and resource allocations may not be fulfilled. As the architecture that drives development assistance changes, that which supports gender equality and women's empowerment must be strengthened to meet new challenges.

Clearly, there is a need to change what was decided during the Beijing Conference, and the restructuring of "gender entities" is accordingly part of the ongoing reform of the whole UN system. However, regrettably, women's voices are far away from international and national bureaucracies, in whose hands the decision-making power almost exclusively lies. Currently, the debate is whether the new gender entity should be a body of the Secretariat or a UN agency for women (i.e. like UNIFEM but with a higher budget) which would have the mandate to negotiate the implementation of women's agendas at the national level. Surely I do prefer this second option, but I nonetheless acknowledge that there is a huge work to be done inside member states' bureaucracies to push for such an architecture that would be closer to women's interests. I think that gender experts should be brave enough to

²⁷ The Development Assistant Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

admit that bureaucracies have bureaucratized women and development politics, marginalizing women's agency. They should dare to say that technical entities have to change radically. We have the responsibility to change bureaucracies, especially at the international level.

In rising up to these challenges, women's networking within and outside gender institutions can prove to be a powerful ally; while gender advisors must take into account feminist analysis, researches and practices in their work. They, or we, should try to overcome the contradictions of the processes we work within as well as the overwhelming power of the dominant economic institutions and mechanisms that shape our lives. These very commitments should similarly be taken up by women who are positioned in national gender machineries.

I do agree with Gabriella Rossetti that «what is at stake, is the very nature of what is called political public action and the need to transform it, not just by including women as such, but by questioning the roots of its invention and development as a specialized space vis-à-vis other spaces, thoughts, skills which were labeled as non public and non political *because* inhabited by women.»²⁸ But in order to do so, women should take up their responsibilities – and this is particularly true for those who work within the institutions or within women's networks and call themselves feminist, as well as for gender and development advisors, who should be capable to analyze international development policies from a gender perspective.

Globalization has pointed out the possibility to guarantee the «quality of life» (Nussbaum and Sen, 1993) to the population of the whole planet. Recent mutations ignited by the increasing recourse to emergency to respond to armed conflicts or natural disasters notwithstanding, development cooperation sets itself as the main tool to fulfill this possibility. Such is the responsibility, that it must continuously be tuned to questioning its own actions and capacity to improve everybody's quality of life. In the first place, this self-criticism could open a new cycle that would be very helpful to speed up the UN reform process. But more importantly, it would shift and widen the scope of the new aid modalities from implying mere changes in the framework for transferring “economic resources”, to a conception that enables everyone to have a stake in the choices related to his/her life, at all level of governance: starting from the family, and reaching up to international institutions.

Women in many countries of the world have shown how their role can be crucial in the survival of the whole community. However, they do not have

²⁸ See Gabriella Rossetti's paper “Geographies of partnership”, published in this book.

sufficient autonomy nor possibilities to spell out their roles, especially at the decision making level. The worldwide qualitative and quantitative increase in women's agency that is taking place in the last thirty years has led many women to debate whether the concepts of "development" or of "women's empowerment" are the best avenues to promote the political and cultural changes which are needed to achieve gender equality.

Although extensively discussed and fitfully defined, the concept of empowerment as related to women's agency is invested of a particular significance. In fact, it does not point towards the fulfillment of an objective and static criterion of equality between men and women. Rather, it opens up to the wealth of "differences" among differently situated women across differing cultural, geographical, historical contexts, interlinking changes between men and women in the political, relational and social processes.

As many scholars acknowledge,

[...] aid agencies and development practitioners tend to use the concept of gender in reductionist ways, failing to grapple with issues of power, conflict, and the larger social, cultural and political contexts that frame women's ability to resist conditions of oppression. Indeed the use of narrow, rigid understanding of gender, despite the seeming focus on the inequality generated within notions of masculinity and femininity can lead to an over-emphasis on structures and institutions at the expenses of seeing the agency of women, an agency that may not just perpetuate inequalities but also challenge them. (Bhavnani et al., 2003: 5)

In most cultures, "personal" life care – meant as the biological and psychological cycle of human beings – has been attributed to women, whose task consists in managing the private and familiar life; whereas the public space, the communities' destinies and, therefore, politics, have been reserved for men. Probably such a dichotomist and hierarchical separation lies at the core of the past and contemporary practices of dominion and violence against women. Only few countries in the world have considered the public space accessible to both sexes, as is the peculiar case of the industrialized ones as a result of the ground-breaking struggle of women's and feminist movements. The "first" western feminist movement wanted to obtain women's right to vote and to enter the space of political representation; whereas the second feminist movement, in the seventies, strove to achieve real "gender equality" in the public sphere while transforming sexual roles in the private one. However, this trend towards increasing women's participation in the public sphere has often forced them to comply with the «bureaucratic relations that dominate the institutional places and women are

caught in the web loosing their transformative power» (Porter and Judd, 1999: 11).

The current crisis of polity and development politics and the impossibility to get out from the world destabilization produced by economic globalization, reveal the centrality of the separation between the public and the private aspects of human life as organized by national institutions. Technological development and economic processes are changing the modalities which organize the biological and psychological cycle of human life. In fact, «while generally theorized as the product of economic restructuring, globalization also restructures cultures and societies and therefore the ways in which people construct their identities» (Bergeron, 2001: 985).

Nowadays, and peculiarly for what concerns development cooperation policies, it's foremost necessary to understand how the different roles of women and men and their interrelation are changing, both in the private and in public life. This implies not only an analysis of the gender policies of the state, but also of the different impact of the institutions at multiple levels and especially at the local one, where globalization trends seem to be significantly influencing individuals' life choices. I do agree with Shirin M. Rai when she asks «Given the changing nature of governance and the changing nodes of power, how are women's movements responding in terms of strategizing for change?» (2002: 159). However, I do consider that not only women's movements but also women within the institutions should answer to this question.

The Italian development cooperation and gender policies

As you can see, my critique to development mainstream policies is quite “radical” as it incorporates feminist, post-colonial and subaltern studies, as well as the suggestions, practices and new perspectives arising from World Social Forum meetings, into the forging of a new practice for international cooperation. This is not simple for me to say, not only because I am working in an Overseas Development Aid (ODA) bureaucracy, but peculiarly because it took a long time before the Italian one started to approach women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD) issues.

Institutionally, it was only in 1987 that the first Italian legislative framework for development cooperation explicitly addressing women was approved, and it became operational in the early nineties. Few institutional initiatives related to women and development issues had occurred since then – mostly studies and researches adapting the international WID and GAD standard methodologies and procedures to the Italian context. Scarce attention had

been devoted to feminist groups' critiques raised during the UN Conferences on Women as well as to the changing context of development as resulting by the mounting pressure of globalization. Within this context, my personal commitment was to apply GAD methodologies through the lenses of feminist critiques to globalization and of the Italian feminist context. Nonetheless, I was literally living as a personal dilemma what Shirin M. Rai describes:

Building on the WID/GAD debates, but extending them in different directions there emerged in the 1980s and the 1990s the postmodernist feminist critique of development [...] the growing acknowledgement of the fact that state- based strategies of development were not working and that international agencies remained concerned with rather narrow development agendas, led to disillusionment with "the project of development itself". (2002: 74)

I took up my current position in the DGCS²⁹ at the times when the armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia was exploding as one of the consequences of the end of the dual global order. Those tragic events raised Italian women's groups' consciousness of the dire trends of globalization as they became interested in the difficult situations that women of other cultures, especially in the Mediterranean area, were facing. Women's groups and associations at the local level, and peculiarly those that during the 80s had played an active role in the pacifist movement, activated solidarity chains and programs accordingly, by means of a new aid modality called "decentralised cooperation".

Looking with interest at these experiences while sharing with a group of Italian feminists (practitioners and academics) the concerns and critiques to mainstream development approach, I tried to introduce these experiences as part of the Italian "added value" in GAD initiatives. Thus, the practices of Italian women's networks were being taken up on board and translated into a "transformative" approach to gender and development policies.

It took some years for this strategy to become a reality. However, the new cultural and political environment created at the end of the 90s by the UN Conferences – in particular the United Nations Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) and the World Social Summit (Copenhagen, 1995) – as well as my Directorate's choice of adopting new approaches to poverty eradication and GAD, helped me in fulfilling these challenges. Human

²⁹ Direzione Generale per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (*General Directorate for Development Cooperation*).

development was put at the core of the new set of Guidelines that the DGCS developed (in 1998 for Gender and in 2000 for Poverty) and incorporated innovative elements aiming to strengthen and sustain democratic processes during peace and socio-economic transition. Therefore, the programs promoted by the DGCS aimed to create a policy and organizational framework within which actions suggested by the different actors – on the basis of participatory analysis of needs and priorities and of the effective availability of resources – would be integrated through a process of “concertation”. The different levels of action and the peculiar concertation mechanisms characterizing this approach are particularly important:

- *at the local level*, it implies supporting organized local communities in the planning and implementation of activities;
- *at the national level*, it requires supporting policies and instruments (regulatory, financial, supervision, training, etc.) for strengthening local authorities, public and private institutions, social services, associations, NGOs and other organized civil society groups;
- *at the international level*, it requires facilitating exchanges and providing support to networks aiming to connect such different experiences.

Such a strategy postulates that: poverty should be tackled with through a multisectoral approach; partner countries should be given the possibility to link “development programs” to their national policies; and the concept of governance should take into account the different stakeholders’ relationships reconfiguration in the public arena. Overall, this framework could make space for a new approach to women’s empowerment in which the analysis of UNDP 1995 Human Development Report would figure as its initial point of reference:

Gender differences bear important implications for development at all levels of decision-making: at the macro level, which considers the nature and content of “growth”; at the meso level, where redistribution of assets and resources is decided; and at the micro level, where initiatives directed to empowering livelihoods are to be taken. At the micro level, men and women typically have different roles and responsibilities and powers in household and firms. Both these institutions are structured hierarchies, marked by internal conflict as well as co-operation. At the meso level, the focus is on public expenditures to provide infrastructure services and markets that link household and firms into the national economy. Here men and women have different entitlements and access. For instance, public services and markets tend to operate according to rules and

norms that ignore the requirements of the “reproductive” economy. At the macro level, different sectoral growth rates and shifts make different demands on male and female work schedules and have different implications for the gender divisions of income and work. (1995: 89)

The incorporation of participatory governance within this multidimensional and participatory approach to development, enhances the possibilities for women's agency in the political decision-making process, insofar as:

- it links those sectors in which women are more visible to others where a gender perspective is often difficult to be spelled out. Moreover, it offers the possibility to increase the impact and authority of women's leadership;
- the adoption of a multi-level strategy for poverty facilitates the creation of an “empowering partnership” between and among political and economic institutions and civil society. In fact, women's movements and organizations are complex and fragmented, and have little impact on more influential social actors, such as trade unions and other national representative organizations. At the same time, women in the institutions are often marginalized due to the lack of a critical mass of women backing them. Enhancing women's participation from the micro level can open up new opportunities both to counteract the marginalization of gender units within the bureaucracies, and to fulfill women's transformative role in politics;
- a decentralised co-operation approach emphasizes the perception of women's capabilities enhancement as an asset. Insofar as it highlights women's economic contribution in the informal and reproductive activities, this paradigm supports a widened understanding of women's full enjoyment of human rights, and especially of the economic ones. Women are thus granted enhanced possibilities to bring their vision, knowledge and experience into the local development agenda. Accordingly, the “engendering budget initiative” carried out at the national level in many countries of the world could thus be applied as well to Provincial and Local budgets.

Women's experiences as highlighted and acknowledged through the reinforcement of dialogues among and across Northern and Southern women's movements and civil society organizations proved to be essential assets in order to mainstream effectively gender planning and women's empowerment in the Italian development programs approach. Out of the first such experiences, in Cuba and South Africa, the following lessons learnt can

be pointed out:

- *in a multi-level framework*, the participation of the national machinery for gender mainstreaming and the involvement of gender units within the multilateral and bilateral agencies have to be envisioned at the very beginning of the trilateral “concertation” process;
- *in a decentralised co-operation framework*, women’s participation both in the North and in the South needs to be supported through specific international networking activities;
- *at the local level*, actions to empower women’s groups and to sensitize stakeholders in gender analysis and planning are needed;
- *at the national level*, specific campaigns and workshops involving media, universities and women’s NGOs, can prove particularly important to enhance accountability on gender issues;
- *at the international level*, the possibility to create links between this approach and other “global initiatives” and/or methodologies (e.i. Engendering the budget, Sector Wide Approaches etc.) needs to be pursued.

This methodology and approach came to be analyzed from a gender perspective during an international seminar on “Decentralization and gender policies” organized in 2002 by UNIFEM in cooperation with the Universities of Ferrara and Modena. What was at stake, was the impact of both local government institutions and women’s international networks on women’s empowerment. Through a multidisciplinary perspective, and by gathering different women’s voices and experiences, seminar’s participants tried to analyze the changing development dynamics and questioned the work of transnational women’s groups and associations, universities in the North and in the South, women in local and national institutions and international development organizations. In this context, the new forms of partnerships for development initiated by Italian women’s and feminist groups came to be singled out as particularly innovative. Indeed, since the outbreak of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, these groups have used a form of intervention based on the experiences of concertations with local institutions they were the protagonist of in Italy during the second half of the 70s. Such experiences transformed partnerships, solidarity and trans-local exchanges among women of different countries into political avenues to change the patterns of development cooperation, provoking an epistemological change of the traditional donor/beneficiary relationship.

The Tamkeen Program

When my Directorate started to work officially with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) through the support to the Directorate for Gender Planning and Development (DGPD) within the Ministry of Planning, all the work done in the previous years in terms of human development approach and of the involvement of transnational women's networks was already part of the Italian gender and development methodology. The new program, which was called Tamkeen (an Arabic word standing for "empowerment"), represented a step forward of my Administration in the approach to gender issues, insofar as it acknowledged the support to a national gender machinery as part of the official *Italian-Palestinian Country Program for Development*.

I have to mention that since 1996, other successful programs dealing with gender issues had already been financed by the Italian development cooperation in Palestine, both of which in the Gaza Strip: one carried out through IFAD, aiming to support women's economic empowerment by means of creating a "business incubator"; and the other through UNFPA, which established two health centers for reproductive rights. However, these programs did not involve directly the PNA but were managed by an Italian NGO in partnership with Palestinian NGOs. Therefore, the Tamkeen program was invested of a particular relevance as it was bringing gender issues into the policy dialogue between the two Governments.

A number of positive circumstances can help to explain such a significant achievement in terms of Italian and Palestinian institutions' recognition of the strategic value of gender equality and women's empowerment. Nonetheless, in my view, relationships between the Italian women's networks – such as "Visiting difficult places"³⁰, "Orlando" or "Women in Black" – and some Palestinian ones active during the first Intifada, played a critical role in catalyzing such an attitude change in both Government's institutions. In fact, it is undeniable that the work of these networks facilitated the emergence and acknowledgement of Palestinian women's

³⁰ In Italy a group of women had started a project called *Women Visiting Difficult Places*, which aimed to promote dialogue between women on different "sides" living in countries where there is conflict. They visited Israel and Palestine in 1988, and gave support to Women in Black (WIB) there. They returned to establish their own WIB, Donne in Nero, which soon organised weekly vigils in Rome, Milan, Bologna, Turin, Ravenna, Padua and Verona. Large numbers of women from Italy have maintained a programme of visits to Israel/Palestine for over a decade. In 1989 they helped promoting in Jerusalem an event, *Time for Peace*, including a huge human chain around the walls of the old city, and in 1996 shared with Bat Shalom the organization of the campaign *Sharing Jerusalem*.

political agency. For this reason, since the program's identification phase, I wanted to involve as experts women who had been working within these networks, as I was convinced that they could bring an appropriate methodology for this specific initiative. According to this political framework as well as to the human development approach – both fully shared with the PNA partner institution – the specific goal of the Tamkeen program was fostering Palestinian women's empowerment by means of enhancing women's groups agency at the local level and their engagement in negotiations with the PNA.

Flowing from that conceptual framework, at the national level the program aimed to introduce some mechanisms that would facilitate women's participation in gender policies and programs' decision-making processes, by fostering collaborations and exchanges on women's empowerment transnationally. By adopting such a participative approach and strategy, the Tamkeen program tried to look at the basic aspects of women's empowerment as part of the dialogue between the central institution (DGPD in a first phase, then upgraded to become the Ministry of Women's Affairs, MOWA) and the new women's centers at the local level which would have been created in the framework of this initiative.

Upon conclusion of the first phase of the Tamkeen program in 2005, in light of the current critical situation for the women in Palestine and also in the management of the second phase of the program, I would like to share some reflections with the participants to this seminar.

First of all, as a positive achievement I would like to underline the open relationship and collaboration we had with the Ministry of Women's Affairs of the PNA, Ms. Zahira Kamal. To attest this good relationship, I want to mention the way in which MOWA's "Plan of Action 2005-2007" framed the partnership with Italy:

"[...] One of the main projects of DGPD was "Tamkeen", a project funded by the Italian Cooperation for Development. The project main objective was strengthening the networking amongst governmental and non-governmental organizations working or aiming at women's empowerment. It helped to come up with a Palestinian definition of "women empowerment", through a participatory approach. The project targeted Palestinian organizations active in women empowerment projects and academic research institutions to identify a Palestinian concept of empowerment and its indicators. It also helped to highlight the fact that the empowerment action of Palestinian women cannot be achieved without providing women's associations with network

opportunities and means to change mentalities and behavior towards women. The exchange of experience on similar projects with other countries was also carried out as a methodology to evaluate expected results and indicators. [...] Activities in this component include establishing "forums" or virtual coordinating bodies which will be the suitable platform for discussing theoretical approaches to women's empowerment in Palestine, exchange of knowledge and best practices, join efforts for improving women's position within society and presenting a good example for cooperation between governmental and nongovernmental organizations. These activities included also conducting three international conferences to network with women activists in other countries, three national conferences to discuss issues related to Palestinian women's empowerment, six mini conferences on pressing issues and six training of trainers' workshops. Proceedings of the conferences and training manuals will be published and distributed to all stakeholders. (MOWA, 2004: 12)

The second achievement, from my point of view, has been the joint effort of the two institutions involved (MOWA and DGCS) in finding ways to escape the donor/beneficiary relationship, meant as a hierarchical power: a practice which tried to take into account many criticisms that feminist studies have raised during the last 20 years when analyzing the "institutional aid modalities". Such an approach, not free from problems and conflicts as arising from different interests and positionings – as Gabriella Rossetti has illustrated in her paper – stems indeed from a very important understanding and practice of "participation" and "relationship" born among women's networks working in the field of international cooperation. (Connelly et al., 2000: 51)

Following from the two abovementioned, the third achievement has been to carry out a development program where women's agency and subjectivity were considered crucial not only to their families' welfare but also in the political arena, at the national as well as at the local level³¹. Both the

³¹ «Analysts of the Palestinian women's movement concur that women experienced empowerment as a result of their involvement in the Intifada. But although women from all segments of the society were mobilized to take part both spontaneously and by way of political organization, their gains were not able to be sustained. In the wake of the peace process, Palestinian women leaders found themselves outside the male-dominated political circles where official policy regarding the future of autonomy in Gaza and the West Bank is being determined. In the early 1990, new specialized and more professional women's centers were established. These centers started to work on specific issues related to women's situation such as combating violence against women and women's studies. Palestinian National

national institutions involved were convinced that the main output of Tamkeen should be to remove gender barriers against women in the “public space”, starting from local level negotiations and activities. Such a consideration of women’s capabilities could have never been carried out without the partnership with Ms. Zahira Kamal.

Unfortunately, this strategic “institutional prerequisite” which had allowed the establishment of two women’s resources centers in Hebron and Bethlehem during the Tamkeen I, dissolved after the Palestinian parliamentary elections of 2006. After the DGCS had been experiencing nearly one year of “institutional” difficulties in launching the second phase of Tamkeen³², I need to mention that we could not carry out some of the activities foreseen such as: the capacity building and technical support for small women's organizations in different parts of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem; the identification of best practices and exchange of knowledge amongst civil society organizations; the establishment of a women's fund, as the main implementing body for women's projects at local level. One could come to the conclusion that the whole program failed in achieving the main output of the empowerment of women, meant as their enhanced capacity to manage their basic needs. From this point of view it could have been more useful to support women’ NGOs activities. However, in the same years the Italo-Palestinian development program was also including the support to the establishment of a Centre for Women Victim of Violence in Bethlehem³³, carried out through a shared management of two women’s NGOs (one Palestinian and one Italian). Whereas that program is still working, the Tamkeen II is blocked by institutional impediments which come from the complexity of the ongoing conflicts, not only between Israel and the PNA, but also among different Palestinian political parties.

Perhaps one could accept this situation as the main cause blocking the follow up of the program, or else it could be assumed that programs for women’s empowerment in fragile states should refrain from entering the realm of the institutional-building of gender entities due to their weakness in front of the “real political power”.

Nevertheless this assumption could bring us to avoid questioning what are the potentialities women can express in preventing conflicts and in changing men’s and women’s attitude towards the use of violence. In Palestine, during

Authority leaders began to exclude women's participation soon after the PNA establishment, reviving traditional, clan-based forms of politics “that leave women out”.» (MOWA, 2004: 8)

³² For budget reasons the DGCS funds through the bilateral channel were available only at the end of the year 2006.

³³ See Annex II: Mehwar Centre for the protection and empowerment of women and families.

the first Intifada, women's participation was really supportive of the peace dialogues. The same cannot be said for the second Intifada, throughout which women's voices have been captured by conflicting interests and positions. The Tamkeen program did not help to solve this "political" problem and was rather embed with "development" rhetoric giving priority to women's economic and social empowerment. Maybe the fact that it was framed within national institutions development policies contributed to "marginalize" the real strengths that women could express. This was especially true for the Italian side, insofar as DGCS did not acknowledge the priority of the program by timely financing its second phase, causing the women's centers at the local level which had just been established to fail.

However, more generally speaking, our experience shows how the analysis of asymmetrical power relationships between women and men in situations of conflicts is still insufficient, especially in the present scenario which is characterized by aggressive international politics. It is not without sense to say that the main achievement of women in the UN, the Security Council Resolution 1325/2000, represents the first reason of the decline of women's role in the United Nations' multilateral policy. That resolution lies unattended, and in the countries where there is the political will to apply it, it is oriented to support women as victims, without any acknowledgement of their autonomous agency. Probably this weakness of women vis-à-vis the use of violence is the reason why the "gender entity" is thought of as a marginal body in the framework of the UN's ongoing reform process. I think we should gaze and analyze this perspective in our trans-national networks.

These few considerations do not certainly pretend to be exhaustive nor to substitute a more in-depth evaluation of Tamkeen, which is indeed mostly needed. Nonetheless I want to stress how important the commitment of all those who worked for more than three years in the program has been. I thank them all and particularly those who prepared this seminar, because it allows us to discuss openly the sustainability of alternative ways of approaching effective policies for the empowerment of women in conflict situations.

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Part Two

Women's networking and development cooperation in the Middle East

Voices from Palestine

The role of international cooperation in the empowerment of Palestinian women

An interview to Zahira Kamal by Elena Zambelli

ELENA ZAMBELLI: Ms. Zahira Kamal has been the Palestinian Minister of Women's Affairs since the establishment of the Ministry itself, in December 2003, until the latest parliamentary elections held in January 2006. During her mandate, she's been partnering the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the implementation of the Tamkeen project, which scaled up with her when leaving the Directorate for Gender Development and Planning for the recently established Ministry. At present, Ms. Kamal is the Director of the Palestinian Women's Center for Research and Documentation, Ramallah. Nonetheless, Ms. Kamal's relationships with (some) Italian women dates farer back in time – the times of the first war in Lebanon for some, of the first Intifada for others, the Oslo's interim period or the second Intifada for still many more. As friends, and partners, we're honored to have you here with us in this seminar to share, reflect, discuss our reciprocal and joint experiences regarding our multiple axis of interactions.

ZAHIRA KAMAL: First of all I want to thank the Italian women for this opportunity, and also for inviting other Arab women to this conference, that gave us the opportunity to meet and exchange experiences. That is the Italian women: we witness that they were one of the most active countries on networking, and from a feminist perspective: perhaps this is not documented in the academic works, but they were the first doing that. As Palestinians we met in Bologna, Italy, with Algerians Moroccan, Egyptian women in a time when it was impossible for us to travel to these countries!

ELENA ZAMBELLI: Let me start from the Tamkeen project, which is supported by the Italian cooperation. Tamkeen, in Arabic, means "empowerment": and this is precisely the key word on which we've been building the methodology of the project. Could you describe us the process of critique, analysis and reflection that we've been pursuing within its framework?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: At the incipit of the Tamkeen project, the first step was defining the concept. To do so, we decided to look at how our local communities define empowerment. We started with meetings with representatives of Palestinian organizations, to discuss together how they perceived this concept. We established a forum composed of 27 different organization which were based in Ramallah but had branches in different areas, and we discussed together how they defined empowerment: I am not exaggerating when I say that we came up with 27 different definitions! In the same time it was like coming to a mutual understanding of that concept and to come with one definition as a group. So we went back to trace historically how this concept was used and in what ways. To come with a clear vision and understanding we contracted Birzeit University to make a study. But in the same time, it was also a tool to involve academicians to create and share more information, knowledge and understanding about it. The study made by Birzeit University on the Palestinian vision and definition of empowerment made us understand that there are different meanings for empowerment corresponding to different periods of time. In the 70s perhaps it was used by feminist women's organizations and national movements in different countries – and specially in Latin America and South East Asia – to express the willingness for a better kind of life, justice, social change, equality for women. Then, over time, that concept lost its radical meaning as it was mainly used by development agencies: here there was a shift from a conception of collective empowerment to individual empowerment – i.e. to empower women and give them some kind of tools for self-assertiveness, etc. The concept of empowerment returned to its original meaning after the Beijing conference in 1995, which brought back together the individual and the collective dimensions of empowerment.

Then, with Birzeit, we built an analytical framework for projects that are supported by different donors who are using the term “empowerment of women”. We found that donors as well – such as Oxfam, USAID, the EU – match this very same term with different meanings: so even between donors there is no common understanding or agreement about what it is meant as empowerment of women! In the same time we could not find appropriate indicators for evaluating progress with regards to the empowerment of women: so how can you evaluate the outcomes of a project if there is no agreement on which indicators to adopt?!

ELENA ZAMBELLI: Clearly, empowerment means different things to differently positioned people in differing times and spaces. But there is at least one, obvious thing that remains the same: it has to do with power. Would you give us some insights on the discussions you had, as Palestinian women, on this concept and its practices?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: We found there was a need to make some internal discussions on empowerment and to relate it to “power” and particularly to analyze in depth the practices of *power over*: which has not only to do with the government in relation to the people governed, or the donor/beneficiaries relationship; but it is also found inside the organizations themselves, as power is exercised from who takes the decisions over who executes them, from those who decide what needs to be addressed, and the “beneficiaries”. Then we discussed whether the *power to* have access to resources is enough to imply that women are empowered. And we found it is not enough: sometimes they have access to education but are not part of the decision-making, others do domestic work which still is not recognized as a “proper” work, so its value is not recognized. Then there is the *power with*: and here we're talking about partnerships, women's organizing, awareness-raising, advocacy... bending different alliances in order to make change happen. Finally, the *power within*: that means that women are becoming more self-confident about themselves, they believe they have the power to make the change in their life, and in their society.

Three levels, three dimensions of empowerment: people have the right to decide for themselves and to have different options. Because if you don't have different options, you cannot decide: there is only one way, whether you like it or not! Thus it is important that people can see that there are different options and they can decide and their experiences are taken into consideration. Similarly, building the capacities of the people helps them in making the project sustainable, and to take it over after the support is finished: as at the end, they have to be independent! When you empower people, it is very important to encourage them to be part of a group, to be organized, because change does not come by individuals alone, but through collective work.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: You said that partnerships are a way of expressing the dimension of “power with”. And this refers to – or should refer to – partnerships in development cooperation. Can you tell us your views on women's networking, within and beyond development cooperation?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: First of all, when we talk about international cooperation we are talking about crossing-borders, exchanging different views and different kinds of power relations, which involve the creation of some expectations. But what kind of power is actually developed through these relations? Is it a kind of power “with” or is it a power “over”? Because when we talk about international cooperation we also talk about money, resources, unequal relationships: someone, who has the resources, gives, and the other partner gets. So how do you bridge the gap between them? In our experience with the Italian Cooperation, when we were talking about

empowerment, there was not somebody who is empowering somebody else: there was a real partnership on that, there was discussion, regarding both the theory and the practice – and this is very important because often there is separation between theory and practice. And there was mutual recognition of other people's experiences: that's why we established a scientific committee composed of Palestinian and Italian academicians. By this, practically we are saying and implementing the fact that it's not only one party who is knowing and the other is learning. Both of us should know more about the experience of the other, learn, understand. It is a mutual relationship in which there are different experiences which should be exchanged, and where each one is learning from the other and each time there is something new coming from and for each partner. The common ground of the Tamkeen Project is that we believe that both of us are benefiting from it: it is not only one benefiting and the other just watching, reporting and studying "the case", but there are two partners and each of them is benefiting and learning. Similarly, "networking" means that we are empowering each other: there is not one who's giving and one who's taking, both partners are benefiting. And as empowerment is related to resources, organizations, partnership, sharing, it is my opinion that it also constitutes one of the outcomes of networking itself. For this reason, I think it is important that these experiences such as the Tamkeen project are not left without documentation, so that it is possible to build on them, have deeper discussions on the subjects, and come up with a methodology of building partnerships as related to the empowerment of women on both sides – thus, including the donor's side, as well as the participation of the people involved in the networking. Participation is the problem.

Following from that, I think there are different levels of networking: it can be understood as coordination, participation, or partnership and of course when we talk about partnership we are talking about sharing commitments, visions that we are willing to reach together. In addition, when talking about networking, we are talking about conflicts and conflict resolution. Do we try to solve conflicts through networking? Do we put space enough on the table for the conflicts, not to make them become obstacles preventing us from moving forward? Networking needs building trust between each other, it is a willingness to exchange experiences with a clear division about roles and weight among the partners.

Accordingly, networking is not only at the financial level but also at the political one. It can be a tool of change: it allows to know the effective political situation in a country and consequently having a voice or pressing at the political level, asking to make changes. For instance, two weeks ago a lot of Italian women went to Palestine to demonstrate against the Gaza siege.

We have had different kind of support from the Italian community: moral support, political support. Again, in 1989, a lot of Italian women and men came to participate in a demonstration in Jerusalem, the *Human chain around Jerusalem*. Later on in 1996 there was a big demonstration in which we have talked about *Sharing Jerusalem*, about Jerusalem being capital of two states. Moreover during the building up of the wall around Jerusalem a lot of people went to support the Palestinian people against the construction of the wall.

One of such experiences, sharing the “financial” and the political side of networking, is the one we’re having with the Italian Women in Black, to which Silvia Macchi is participating in. Since the invasion of Jenin by the Israeli occupation, the Women in Black are supporting powerless women in order to empower them, addressing their emergency needs while sustaining development, through giving them some financial support to start their small businesses. The invasion left destruction, demolition of houses, many women became widows. There is no work and very slight support from outside. These projects relate to the needs of the women, who said that they are in need to start with their own small window-shops, in which they could sell what they produce or what they could bring from the surrounding areas. Over time, these women are becoming one group, discussing their problems and developing themselves. This is also another relation in which there is real empowerment for these people: because whatever is and can be said about the women’s movement, it cannot outreach all women in the community. There is also an individual responsibility, to develop themselves and also to empower themselves and to build the feminist relationship, to organize women in different ways – as in trade unions, societies, coalitions – and advocate for themselves, for their rights. And this process requires time and long term commitment. And we are not depending on the Italian cooperation or whoever from outside to come and develop these kind of internal relations: they should develop on its own. Rather we should learn from each other how to network and how to get the tools and addresses in order to build other kinds of relations. So there are no ready made receipts to follow: everything depends on the community itself and how you are developing that.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: You’ve been raising many issues, and I’ll pick them up one by one. First, conflicts within networks: How do you deal with them to avoid staining or vanquishing the meaningfulness of partnerships?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: Firstly, it is how you can monitor the development of the projects, how to see the achievements and discover the problems in very early stage, not to leave them to accumulate and become a problem or conflict. Then it is about developing the skills according to the needs of the

group: not only the technical ones but also others related to networking, communication, participation, partnership, sharing information, team work, conflict resolution: all of these issues are important to be addressed and practiced.

One problem that can occur is that different experiences differ from each other on theoretical and/or practical basis: that needs some time given to more discussion, to more understanding, not to jump to the next stage before you have solved misunderstandings and problems, and come to a deep mutual understanding.

Another thing that can constitute an obstacle is the lack of understanding of the culture. What helps us, is that people working on a project are used to the culture of Palestine. And when we talk about common ground and understanding between partners, is not only about signing an agreement – which covers the requirements of the donor agency, how to do the project, the modalities... What we need is common ground on the personal, human level, as we're talking about different human beings who have different needs and ways of working together. In this perspective, I really liked your paper³⁴, where you use a feminist perspective to look at international cooperation. And rather than talking about the impact of the projects on Palestinian people, looking at them as objects, you look at the impact of your work of cooperation in Palestine on yourself, as a person, and you raised different words that really I find important to look at. First of all, stereotyping: the way you came to review your knowledge about Palestinians and adapt, accommodate yourself to the situation in order to achieve more understanding of the community, of their needs and how to work on that. The second thing, your paper is looking at occupation and the political situation without flattening it, considering the complexity of that situation on any project you're implementing. So that means you were totally living the situation, you were in there: physically, mentally, emotionally, not only as an outsider working on that project.

In fact, the overall political situation is one of the risks to be considered, as it sometimes forces to stop or pause or suspend the project. When designing a project based on partnership, you have to consider it as such, or you might bump into a stalemate. In the Tamkeen project, if we had discussed the political situation and some changes that could have happened, we could have found ways of avoiding the stalemate and continue the activities, rather than having them stuck as it happened. Nowadays, we assist to dramatic

³⁴ She refers to Elena Zambelli's paper "Paris, Texas, Tel Aviv: a feminist practitioner's reflection on international cooperation in Palestine in the good governance era", published in this book

changes following the election of the new government, their ideology and the new position that the international community has taken: they have always supported Palestinians and many organizations were depending on that. But now? Nobody thought there could be such changes nor to how these could have impacted on ongoing projects. And this includes the Tamkeen project and the independent existence of the Tawasols: we did not think that such a change was upcoming, we did not forecast the political situation as a risk, and thus we have not designed appropriate alternatives. So how can we go on with projects, cooperation, networks, under the boycott of international cooperation and of the international community? With the continuous risks of governments changing? With the fear to compare to Hamas?

ELENA ZAMBELLI: Let's then approach the issue of conflicts from another dimension: that of conflicts as a subject, as an issue catalyzing networks among women whose lives are directly affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also with "outsiders" – concerned individuals, women and men, who are sharing a commitment to make it end. There have been many such experiences of women's networking crossing the physical and emotional barriers arisen by the conflict. What do you think about their appropriateness and effectiveness?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: People always think that networking between internationals and the Palestinians should also balance between Palestinians and the Israelis, without taking the political situation into consideration. As Palestinian, we feel this as making a balance between the victims and the perpetrators. And if we participate in such networks, sometimes we lose credibility in our society: so it makes us think whether we should be in these networks or not. Of course sometimes it is more important for us to have credibility in our society rather than networking with others; although this is also very important to us. So I consider that this is very important to discuss.

However, we are continuing on every track, trying to mobilize all the efforts to end the conflict. One of the experiences that we're trying to push forward is that of the International Women Commission (IWC). The IWC is not a "people to people" activity. It is not a second track of diplomacy. It's not a grassroots organization. It's a partnership among 20 Palestinian, 20 Israeli and 20 internationally prominent women, who recognize the urgent need to achieve a meaningful, just peace between Israelis and Palestinians and feel a shared commitment to accomplish this goal. The goals of the IWC are to: (a) guarantee gender equality and that women's perspectives and experiences be incorporated in any future resolution of the conflict; (b) work for an end to the occupation and genuine negotiations towards a just and sustainable peace; and (c) ensure the meaningful participation of diverse women,

including those from civil society, in any Israeli-Palestinian peace process, including negotiations and supportive initiatives. Its immediate objectives are to: (i) insert a gendered perspective, voice, and experience into the peace process; (ii) ensure that the rights and issues of women affected by the Palestine-Israel conflict are raised and effectively addressed including issues dealing with women's economic, social and cultural rights, and human security; (iii) provide an early warning of obstacles that undermine the two-state solution (Jerusalem, the wall, settlements) and activate interim preventive measures; (iv) contribute to the mobilization of civil society in support for a peace built within a legal, humanitarian and human rights framework.

Now, what we need is to change the political situation, so how we can bring the two partners (Israel and Palestine) to the negotiation table? Italy, France and Spain have submitted a political initiative in order to ask ending occupation and going back to the negotiations table but at the same time how can we influence the European Commission, the European Parliament, to retire the measures they've taken until now ?

It's not possible to continue this way. There are persons who have not received their salary for 10 months. Since 40 years we are suffering from the Israeli occupation politically and economically, we are put under a political and economical siege. According to the Paris agreement³⁵, Israel should return back the taxes paid by Palestinian to the Palestinian Authority, out of which the PA is paying the salaries of civil servants and the costs of the institution itself. But taxes are in the hands of Israel and Israel doesn't give them back to the PA. How can you as feminists, as women's organisations, as politicians, can help in making change? Is it possible to change, by making some pressure on the government of Israel through your leadership?

But networking is not only with outsiders: it also inside the country. We are trying to reach a dialogue between Palestinian NGOs and the Palestinian government so as to raise citizens' voice at all levels. But the framework is uncertain. We have to promote participation with different organizations and

³⁵ The reference is to the Paris Protocols, which have been negotiated in 1994 between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the framework of the Oslo Accords, and that concern interim economic relations between the two parts. Among other things, the agreement established that Israel was to collect, on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (PA), an import tax on goods heading to the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip, and to transfer it to the PA as an administrative duty. Since the election of Hamas in the January 2006 elections, Israel has refused to transfer these funds to the PA. See Geoffrey Aronson (2006) "Financing the Palestinian Authority" – paper prepared under a grant by Canada's International Development and Research Center. Available at: <http://www.fmep.org/analysis/articles/pdf/IDRC3.pdf>

people, at the local and regional level, and also through generations: because there is a gap between the old and the young generation, and that gap should be bridged by giving voice to young people.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: I want to pick up this last point you've just raised and ask you to elaborate on that. Yesterday, during the first day of the workshop, one of the participants, Mrs. Kifah Manasra, raised the issue of the generational gap within the Palestinian women's movement, stating that it constitutes an obstacle to deepening and enlarging women's networks within and beyond Palestine, and that it is part of the explanation of their contemporary lack of effectiveness. Do you share her concerns?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: I acknowledge that the problem of the generational gap in the Palestinian women's movement raised by Kifah Manasra is very important – and it is shared all over the world.

In the same time the old generation fears to lose the ownership of the struggle and the achievements it gained in favor of a young generation that gets all these issues as ready-made, and sometimes without the annexed sacrifices: they did not want to be in the struggle itself but in the same time they now want to be in the decision making. But this cannot be done: you should be present, active at all stages of the process so as to be there. As leaders of the old generation, we know that we cannot stay in leading positions for long, we are aware of the advantages and successes that the women's movement in Palestine has gained, but in the same time we don't know how long can this continue in the future: we are becoming more aware of this since Hamas came to power.

Perhaps, one of the problems that we feel made networking much more difficult for us in the last 6 years, is the political situation, and the closures: it is not that we are not willing to network, but sometimes the family itself is not networking among its own members! It is a very hard and difficult situation, and now with the completion of the separation wall – that is separating us as Palestinians from each other, not only Palestinian from Israelis – it's becoming more hard to make that kind of communications. Sometimes we are trying to use the videoconference, to communicate, for instance, with Gaza: but it's easier to communicate with Italian organizations rather than with women in Gaza, even if these latter are part of our organization and leadership!

However, it does not mean that I'm underestimating what Kifah has said about the generational gap. It is very important to look at it, this is one of the issues we're working on. It is part of our will to develop a new leadership and linkage with young people, young women, and build the new feminist movement in our country, because of the needs and also the issues to fight

for making a considerable change in our society. Forty years ago I was struggling for my education, because at that time it was not easy to go abroad to be educated, but for women like Kifah, this is not such a big issue because now 49% of university graduate students are women. So it is a different kind of struggle, of issues, and I want to know the young generations needs, because now they are totally different from mine.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: Participation, then, is about fostering inclusiveness among diversities stemming from multiple barriers and axes of marginalization. Physical: such as the Wall that is being built on the occupied Palestinian territories. Ideological and emotional: such as the sufferance provoked by the persisting Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Generational. And “cultural”: a slippery term which can be used to indicate that differently positioned people need empathy to understand “the Others”, but also to stigmatize difference and produce marginalization. This is the case, for example, of migrants in Europe and elsewhere, who are negatively stereotyped as carriers of “different cultures”, whereas their contribution to the material and immaterial “development” of both receiving and sending countries goes hardly acknowledged. As a woman, and a Palestinian woman, who has been life-long crossing these and other borders and barriers, what is your perception about the transformative potentials inherent in transnational migrations?

ZAHIRA KAMAL: I think that migration and migrants do have a role in fostering the development of citizenship and democracy in both the hosting and receiving countries. Immigrants, and I think for example to the Palestinians living outside Palestine, are bridges among people, nations and diasporas/ exile. They can give and not only get: and so they contribute to revitalising democracy.

In this perspective, I liked Charito Basa's research title: “She gives back”³⁶. In different countries that experience floods of immigration, they only look at immigrants as if they are ruining the society, getting their jobs, as carriers of backward culture, and so on. They do not see them as intellectuals that can contribute on that, trying to mediate. So, for example, why to mention non-discrimination on the basis of ethnic and religion and all that, in constitutions, if then the country does not want to have immigrants?

Cultures of any country needs that these other cultures are present: to know about them, and acknowledge the change they're bringing. Immigrants are changed during their experiences outside their home countries, and they're changing. This is bringing the democracy into practice into these countries.

³⁶ She refers to Charito Basa's paper “Diaspora philanthropy in Italy”, published in this book

And, for example, their potentials should be acknowledged in terms of “development cooperation”. When working in a country with a team of experts that is going to a country to have a look into your community, I think it would be very important to include people who are coming from those roots. It's not important that they are specifically from the same country, but from the region, so that they know the language, the culture, they can communicate easily – because sometimes people are hesitant to talk to foreigners. So they could even facilitate such kind of work. I think that here there would be also a much more fruitful “giving back”.

As Palestinians, we are doing that, for example, on the academic level. There are many Palestinian women living outside who are becoming top academics in the institutions of the countries where they reside. UNDP is now supporting some of them to come and volunteer in their country of origin: they're not taking the salary of an expert or consultant coming from outside, that maybe is paid 300\$ per day! And for a Palestinian consultant coming from exile it is an opportunity to come to their country, doing something they feel it's important and they want to deliver. The Palestinian Women Research and Documentation Centre that I'm directing, is involved in these projects. For example, with Dr. Faiha Abdel-Hadi, we are documenting the different roles that Palestinian women played in the 30s and 40s: a tool that can be used to communicate with our new generation, and bring them closer to the complexity of our culture.

Bridging divides among women

An interview to Kifah Manasra by Elena Zambelli

ELENA ZAMBELLI: In the period 2005-06, Kifah Manasra has been the manager of the Tawasol centre in Bethlehem. Thus, her experience in facilitating the construction and maintenance of a local network among Palestinian women's organizations is peculiarly relevant for the seminar's discussions. In fact, she can shed light on some of the critical choices that women's networks, movements and organizations have to face in order to pave the way for sustainable processes that can facilitate Palestinian women's (own) empowerment. Please Kifah: tell us what your perceptions and expectations are with regards to this seminar.

KIFAH MANASRA: Let me start by saying that I'm very happy to be here with you: as feminists, as individuals who are close to the people in the grassroots and as a young woman. Many times I've represented my country, in several meetings, but I've never had the chance to discuss women's issues in such depth. By sharing with you my experience as a Palestinian woman, I hope I can help explaining what it means and represents for me "networking" at the local and international level.

I've always been a feminist, since I was young, but I've never had a precise position in the Palestinian women's movement: not in terms of decision-making space, nor in terms of being active in the processes of change. To me, this is the first occasion I've had to meet and participate with Zahira Kamal and Maha Abu-Dayye in the process of making social change, and to present together Palestinian women in their expectations and hopes towards the international networking. As I consider myself coming from the grassroots and as a leader in social change, I have to say that it is rare to meet traditional Palestinian women and feminist leaders in international occasions, as these events used to involve only them.

I think that the majority of Palestinian women do agree with the concepts we're discussing in this seminar, but the problem is that most of them have no voice to act on the decisions that are taken in their name. The same is true for myself: it is through you that today I have been invited here as a young

feminist, to represent Palestinian women.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: You're raising the problem of representativeness of the Palestinian women's movement: who speaks for Palestinian women? And with whom: this is another important question that, as Italian women who've long been pursuing personal and political exchanges with Palestinian women, we should be reflecting upon. What priorities do you think should be addressed today in terms of women's organizing and networking – across, as well as within the borders of your "imagined" state?

KIFAH MANASRA: I was very happy to hear Gabriella Rossetti mentioning the need of a generational renewal within feminist networks – she was referring more to the Italian experience, but I find this comment extremely pertinent to our context as I think such a change could help in solving many critical, pending issues. One of these, is the growing sense of individualism among women's organizations: everybody works for his/her own interests and organization. The feeling of sharing a common objective is lost, as much as the principles and objectives of feminist networking: we are not reaching our women, we are not benefiting our communities. So what are we doing?

In the meantime, poverty in Palestine is increasing: 75% of our people is living under the poverty line. And also violence against women is increasing. We are going back rather than forward, and we are starting to lose our values and knowledge about how to struggle against the Israeli occupation. Meanwhile Israelis continue confiscating our land and building the Wall.

And also women's networks are going back.

Compare the present situation with that of 15 years ago: at that time we did not have such international networking, but we were achieving much more. Now we are having lots of important meetings with lots of important people, and we are connected with lots of movements all around the world: but on the ground, we are going back.

We fell down at the first exam. After Hamas won the elections, most of the international organizations stopped their work, and only a few went on. You are still looking at what the Americans will decide for the Palestinians.

We need to find together an answer to this question: why, despite the big relation we have with you and other movements around the world, nothing is happening on the ground and we are going back more and more and more?

Another important issue is the way power is exercised within women's organizations themselves. As feminists, we talk a lot about power – over, with, without, to... But then, women's organizations are structured in a very

hierarchical way, and oftentimes those who are in higher position exercise their power over those who are in lower positions. This is also one of the reasons why I appreciate taking part to this seminar: in this setting, everybody can express herself freely, and it is extremely important. Nonetheless, I hope that through our common work we can identify solutions, proposals, that can help in the contemporary political scenario in Palestine, which is severely impacting on women's situation and condition.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: You started to speak about power, and the way it is exercised and perceived by women themselves within a women's and/or feminist organization. Do you think that the concept of women's "empowerment" has become just a buzz-word? And if so, what do you think the "outsiders" responsibilities – donor agencies, solidarity networks – are?

KIFAH MANASRA: The concept of empowerment is strictly connected with feminism – both theoretically and practically. But how do we translate this concept in practice – in international cooperation, but not only? Who are we empowering? Are we here discussing how to facilitate the empowerment of women who do not have power or are we just giving more power to the people who already have it? When we entered into the Tamkeen project, it was us – (some) Palestinian and (some) Italian women – who decided who should have participated in these activities. At last, we might have to acknowledge that – consciously or not – we ended up strengthening the strong ones and weakening the weaker further! Nonetheless, we also have to accept that change does not happen within a project timeframe: the lives of the people and the times that changes need to take place cannot be fixed in a timeframe!

ELENA ZAMBELLI: Change. How does it happen, when and what can be conducive to change: I do agree with you that these are issues that go far beyond a "development" cooperation framework. However, change in itself is not good nor bad. Rather, sometimes it can be disappointing for somebody and, within an unequal balance of power relations, it can even lead to retaliation – as is the case today of the Quartet's boycott that you are experiencing as Palestinians, following the victory of Hamas. In the case of the Tamkeen project, the boycott implied a suspension of the activities, because it was not possible for the Italian government to cooperate with the new cabinet.

Institutions are made of people, but many people are not within the institutions: and women are certainly the majority out there! If we could imagine pathways beyond existing diplomatic constraints, what do you think the potentials would be to create bridges and networking channels with the women who support and/or voted for Hamas?

KIFAH MANASRA: Before I came to this seminar, I had two different meetings with Palestinian women to discuss with them what was their opinion about the relationship with the Italian partners.

The first meeting I had was with the women who took part to the Beijing conference and share to date its follow-up process: women who are well acquainted with the concept of “empowerment”. They were very happy about this opportunity for reflection, not least because they saw it as an opportunity to make these concepts reach the public opinion. These women and the institutions they take part to, have acquired the concept of empowerment, and this is positively reflected in their lives. But besides the circumstances that helped them, what has been their ability to reflect this concept to the other women? What techniques did they use for this purpose? Did they outreach to all women’s sectors? Has this concept been translated according to the different environments and realities of the “others” sectors?

The other meeting I had was with the women who belong to Islamic groups and associations – women who do not have a clear idea on what does it mean “empowerment” – neither as a concept, nor as a practice. They said they are willing to establish relationships with the Italian women and that have many ideas and projects they would like to discuss with them. Personally, I was very pleased with the answer of this second group, because it creates opportunities for sharing objectives and ideas, and for breaking the isolation of the feminist movement. I think it is very important to put together these different parts to build a strong women’s movement in the Palestinian society, to be a part in the process of making solutions and revealing out women’s concerns and problems, and to be responsible about Palestinian women. Nonetheless, such concerns shouldn’t be the duties only of the women’s movement.

In this framework, the Italian women movement could play a positive role inside the Palestinian society, supporting the re-organizing of the relationship between all its institutions, governmental and non – considering that organising is in itself a tool for empowerment. However, this is also related to the way funds are distributed and with whom you’re making relations.

ELENA ZAMBELLI: In conclusion, I would like to ask you: is there a positive experience, a best practice relating to processes of women’s empowerment that you would like to share with us?

KIFAH MANASRA: Of course there is. I will mention the case of Palestinian women facilitating the empowerment of Palestinian women living outside the country. In particular, I will refer to the exchanges and shared experiences – training courses, provision of information, exchange of

knowledge – with the Palestinian Women Union, between specialised Palestinian women from women's institutions and women refugees living in the camps in Jordan. Each partner felt equally responsible at all levels – economic, administrative, social – and now women refugees are almost independent in terms of project management.

This is an experience that we should consider when we talk about the partnership between Palestinian and Italian women. And it is also an extremely important example to bring to your attention: because despite the harsh economic and living conditions in Palestine, through her work a Palestinian woman can herself help the families living in refugee camps and vice versa.

Projects, participation and priorities

An interview to Élham Sami Hamad by Barbara d'Ippolito

BARBARA D'IPPOLITO: Throughout this seminar, we're sharing views about the critical issues that women's networking is – or should be – facing at the crossing between personal/political relationship and international development cooperation. As former manager of the Tawasol/Tamkeen project, Elham Sami Hamad is a key person in our reflections on processes activated and stumble points met in terms of partnerships building, across and within borders. Please Elham: tell us what your perceptions are with regards to the networking between Italian and Palestinian women in the framework of the Tamkeen project.

ELHAM SAMI: Relationships need long time, space and structure to be built. In my view, relationships among women should aim to establish networking processes on gender issues that would enable them to exchange knowledge, information, values, skills and attitude world widely.

Transnational networking is a process that can develop in parallel to international cooperation programs. I would say that in the case of Tamkeen project, the relationship between us, Palestinians, and the Italian women involved in the programme like Silvia Macchi e Gabriella Rossetti, does exist and goes beyond what was strictly requested to implement it. But now, in the present situation, I consider that our priority should be to build up and strengthen alliances among Palestinian women themselves.

BARBARA D'IPPOLITO: You talk about alliances-building among Palestinian women as a priority, and something that has not been dealt with until now. Thus, I have to acknowledge that the Tamkeen project was not successful in facilitating this process. What do you think about the original goals of the Tamkeen with regards to networking among women in Palestine?

ELHAM SAMI: One of the goals of Tamkeen was to build up a partnership between MOWA and Palestinian women's organizations in order to facilitate and strengthen the women's movement capacity to negotiate at all levels of

decision-making: international, national and local.

However, my view is that to establish a partnership, you have to start from the commitment to share something. So first you need a process of networking which has to be based on participatory approaches and practices. To me, to participate means succeeding in taking part to something, in sharing a common “something”. Partnership, then, is the result of a networking process based on participation.

BARBARA D'IPPOLITO: You say that participation is a key issue in building up a partnership. Tell us then: which kind of activities has MOWA implemented to encourage the participation of women's organizations at the local level – in the framework of the Tamkeen project, outside of it, and up to date?

ELHAM SAMI: During the first phase of the Tamkeen, when I was its project coordinator, two local forums were established – one in Hebron and the other in Bethlehem – and their aim was to promote the creation of two correspondent local women's resources centres: Tawasol, in Arabic. In MOWA, I spent three months working with Fatmeh Botmeh and the Deputy Ministry to envision the process for establishing the Tawasol centres. With the Deputy Minister, we organized several workshops to define the guidelines for the Forum, how to select the staff, which main activities should have been carried out by the centres. Then, we also had monthly meetings together with the Minister Zahira Kamal, and weekly meetings in Bethlehem and Hebron.

In the meantime, the Ministry sent a letter to all the women's organization in Hebron and Bethlehem asking for the documentation attesting their legal status as well as their activities. However, not all the organizations answered: for some of them, it is still difficult to provide financial reports and other similar administrative documents.

Moreover, after all our meetings we were sending minutes to all the organizations involved in the process to be sure that the objectives of the Tawasol centres were clear to everybody. But in my opinion, the whole process was not participatory, because from the beginning local forums were not involved in decision making. From the beginning the partners were not committed enough or responsible enough. At the same time, MOWA did not hold them responsible towards decision making and treated them as mere stake holders and helpers, due to the laws and regulations related to the Ministry, especially for what concerns financial-administrative issues. Second of all, during the establishment of MOWA; the Tawasol Project was not included in its structure nor strategy.

Anyhow, all the results we achieved have been cancelled by the new Minister, who was appointed after Hamas won the election in January 2006, and who does not involve anybody in MOWA. Currently there are no more meetings concerning Tawasol nor the other projects we have with donors. We have serious communication problems and in these conditions it will be very difficult to establish a Tawasol centre in each Palestinian district.

BARBARA D'IPPOLITO: Your view of "participation" throughout the Tamkeen project is quite negative. What do you think the main obstacles which prevented you from reaching the expected results were?

ELHAM SAMI: First of all, MOWA was lacking skills in developing the participatory approach appropriately. Second, the project was particularly complicated, because of the high number of activities we had to implement. And working together on every single issue was not easy at all. Third: the management of the budget was not transparent in front of the women's organizations involved in the process. At the local level, the boards of the Tawasol were not aware of the amount of money available to carry out the activities: and this made them impossible to develop an action plan accordingly.

In the same time, each of the women's organizations tended to exercise control over every single issue. I think that each of them was minding their own business, and it made them fight constantly with each other. I consider that this problem was particularly serious in Bethlehem: since the beginning, the Tawasol centre was considered as a cake to share, and each organization wanted to get the bigger piece. In Hebron, the women involved in the local forum were much more satisfied with MOWA's coordination. They were better organized and less selfish, and more comfortable with the local institutions and MOWA. This allowed them to interact more easily, and to ask freely what they needed.

There were also some problems inside the organizations themselves. For instance, sometimes members who received some training in the framework of the project did not share the new skills and information with the others. The organizations lack channels and methodologies for internal communication, and this contributed to the misfunctionings of the local forums. In fact, as member organizations' participants to the local forums were rotating, these internal communication's malfunctioning were forcing us to re-start all over again and again.

However, I consider that for the Palestinian women's movement, the main problem was and still continues to be the political parties' attitudes: they do not listen to women's claims and issues, they only want to know to whom will women give their vote. And among women's organizations, this

generates conflicts over money, power and positions.

BARBARA D'IPPOLITO: The relationship between political parties and the women's movement in Palestine is thus problematic. But you also said that it is crucial, if women's issues are to be addressed. So what do you think successful strategies for achieving change could be? And what role – if any – could women's networking play in facilitating this process

ELHAM SAMI: We should start empowering Palestinian women in politics at all levels, so they can adopt women's issues and relate them to political parties' mandates and culture: this can make a change happen. In fact, these parties would then have a role in changing the area of decision making, resulting in a sustainable, rapid change. On the contrary, last elections' results have shown the gap resulting from ignorance of these issues.

Another strategy would result from working with women of all political parties. Merging thoughts and experiences, and selecting the best strategies that would be beneficial for all parties, a new feminine culture will irrupt. One of the results of the communication among these women, would be to enforce a stronger dialogue in the community, supporting the formation of unitary stances on these issues.

When transnational women's networking meets development cooperation

Silvia Macchi

In the last decades transnational networking has become increasingly important in the political strategies of women's movements, helping to put women's empowerment on the agenda of many international institutions and fostering the formation of new political subjectivities in and across different areas of the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that development cooperation is turning to those who experienced these networking practices for the implementation of the third UN Millennium Development Goal, «promote gender equality and empower women»³⁷ Indeed, when collaborating with public development aid programs, women's groups make full use of their transnational networking experience and invite cooperation agencies to follow suit.

This is exactly the case of Tamkeen³⁸, an Italian-Palestinian cooperation programme in which I participated in the capacity of planning expert. Those responsible for devising and running the programme, Zahira Kamal and Bianca Pomeranzi, were two women whose political and professional identity was indissolubly tied to the practices of transnational networking and this identity connoted the whole programme, the way it was set up and implemented. In this paper I will be analysing the Tamkeen programme in terms of the problems that emerged from the combination of international development cooperation and transnational women's networking practices, which were later the subject of a study commissioned from the CIRPS-SPED³⁹ by the UNDP⁴⁰.

³⁷ United Nations. Millennium Development Goals. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>.

³⁸ See Annex I: Tamkeen: fighting poverty through supporting Palestinian women.

³⁹ CIRPS: Centro Interuniversitario di Ricerca Per lo Sviluppo sostenibile (*Interuniversity Research Centre for Sustainable Development*); SPED: Sezione Politiche per l'Empowerment delle Donne (*Section on Policies for the Empowerment of Women*).

I will start by setting out the reasons that prompted me to take part in the Tamkeen programme and which, later, led me to choose this initiative as a case study in women's empowerment policies. Then, I shall take a detailed look at the results of the Tamkeen programme in terms of how women's networking and development cooperation affected each other. The question is: if and to what extent does this contamination contribute towards the achievements of the third millennium goal? Finally, I will be putting forward some proposals aimed at guaranteeing reciprocal benefits for the two practices, beginning with an analysis of what I believe are their intrinsic limitations.

Women's networking between Italy and Palestine

In my case, women's transnational networking and Palestine effectively coincide since I first came into contact with this feminist practice when taking part in a political initiative called "Io donna vado in Palestina" (*I as a woman go to Palestine*), set up by Luisa Morgantini immediately after the outbreak of the second Intifada, with the aim of establishing a continuous relationship between the Palestinian women's movement and a group of Italian women connected to the Women in Black movement⁴⁰. From January 2001, when I first set foot in the occupied Palestinian territories, to the summer of 2005, I saw the world and myself through the relations between Italian and Palestinian women. As a result of this specific experience of life, Bianca Pomeranzi invited me to collaborate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in monitoring the Tamkeen programme. Bianca thought I was the right person for the job, having the skills, experience and professional know-how in the field of participated planning and local development.

Much has been written on transnational women's networking, in positive terms with regard to South South relations and decidedly less so when applied to relations between the North and South of the world. I want to say that while the political usefulness of a "we women of the South" seems to be fairly well consolidated, the construction of a "we women of the North and South" is much more complex and conflicting – and sometimes even undesirable and/or unfeasible – due to the power unbalance between the two parts of the world.

⁴⁰ The study referred to, entitled "Centre for documentation and analysis of Gender and Development activities in Local Human Development programmes", was promoted and funded within the ART framework (Appui aux Réseaux Territoriaux et Thématiques de Développement Humain), an international human development cooperation initiative which brings together the programmes and activities of different United Nations agencies.

⁴¹ <http://www.donneinnero.it/>

I came to these conclusions, which today seem obvious and which need to be analysed if we are to find a solution, through my involvement in trying to establish relations between Italian and Palestine women's movements. I discovered that "networking" involved a huge amount of work, involving oneself, colleagues and Palestinian interlocutors. There is nothing spontaneous, innate, or taken from granted in women's networking: even exchanging a simple smile is always the result of a carefully thought out political choice and a goal that becomes all the more difficult to achieve when there are stubborn confines to be crossed. In this respect, networking is for me a means and an end, a goal that can only be reached by practising it.

I discovered these difficulties gradually. The more confines I crossed the more I found, and each time the difficulties increased and ever greater determination was needed to push ahead. History can provide us with plausible explanations for these growing difficulties. However, I am still convinced that these are not of a purely contingent nature, linked to space and time, but ingrained in the notion itself of networking, a term which today is applied all too facily to the most varied of contexts.

As for the historical reasons, I will mention only the most important. The political project which first brought me to the occupied territories had its roots in the relations that developed between the women in the conflict area and a group of Italian women during the first Intifada, in Palestine and Israel (later the practice was extended to other parts of the world, in particular the Balkans). The practice involves intermediation between the women from the two sides to foster dialogue and break down the wall of incommunicability created by the conflict. It was only with time that I understood that the use of this method in the second Intifada was anti-historical, after the failure of the Oslo peace process and the crisis that swamped women's movements, especially after the Beijing conference (1995), when the inequalities between women in the South and North played havoc with the notion of "we women", which has become almost completely impracticable in the era of preventative warfare and the rigid attitudes it has produced.

This double crisis left us powerless to resist the deepening conflict between occupiers and occupied in Palestine and Israel, and powerless to prevent the spread of the so-called "clash of civilisations" throughout the world, where war was becoming the standard instrument for managing international conflicts.

What was becoming increasingly clear was that the first thing we had to work on was the incommunicability between the Italian Women in Black group and Palestinian women. Our utopia of women's relations across borders, especially as a form of resistance to any national borders that we

regarded as imposed by patriarchy, remained unvoiced in our meeting with Palestinian women, who placed all their hopes of a better life in the creation of their national state. And still today I ask myself how many messages were left expressed or misunderstood. To listen properly we need an inner calm and trust in the person speaking to us, two conditions which I think are impossible in a situation of open conflict, armed or otherwise. If we add to this the feeling of hopelessness produced by the meagre results of the reconciliation initiatives undertaken in the aftermath of Oslo, any motivation for listening to one another in a constructive way also disappears and all that remains are accounts of desperation and impotence.

In short, it was difficult to know where we could possibly find the necessary drive and energy to build a form of resistance together, so that both parties could regain some sort of autonomy in the way they thought of the world and themselves in the world.

In a few words, this was the burden I carried with me in the Tamkeen programme. In the programme – even considering all the doubts I personally had about development cooperation, whose goals and methods had so little in common with the aims and methods of the Women in Black movement – I saw an opportunity of finally finding a politically fruitful platform for the relations between Italian and Palestinian women: women's empowerment.

I thought – and I am still convinced it is true – that before taking once again a common stance against war, it was necessary to (re)build somehow the capacity of both groups to undertake political action “as women” firstly in their own places and then, gradually, in the relations between these places. And in this parallel process towards the reestablishment of relations, we could give each other a helping hand simply by being there and knowing that we were not alone.

Some intrinsic limits of *women's networking*

The possibility of directing political relations between Italian and Palestinian women towards empowerment was not, however, the only reason which prompted me to enter the field of development cooperation. After two years of networking practices with Palestinian women, in fact, I had convinced myself that this method had intrinsic limits which made it difficult to fully develop the opportunities for the construction of common political action.

Firstly, it is hard to effectively include more people in networking. The relations on which this practice is based, in fact, is one of “presence” which, precisely for this reason, begins and ends with the people taking part in it.

Exchange opportunities depend on them and develop from them. That these exchanges should produce something new, such as partnerships, is another matter. Indeed, Gabriella Rossetti rightly noted that a network is not only «a framework of different partnerships» but also «a “home”, a temporary dwelling which can shelter and restore the energies and beauty of individual and common visions: no matter if they will not come into being»⁴². The fact that it is also a “home” produces closure towards other women in the world, due to the desire to protect the small but precious common ground that has been created. The intrinsic nature of a “presence relationship”, added to the tendency to defend such a laboriously established setting from potentially destabilising external incursions, generates a great contradiction between the reduced number of women that can effectively take part in networking and the need to increase the number of participants, an increase which to my mind is an essential condition for the development of collective intelligence, which alone can ensure the emergence and sustainability of the new political subjectivities – at least for someone like me who does not believe in avant-gardes or elites.

A second limit lies in the fact that “networking” does not in itself involve any mutual responsibility and cannot handle the switchover to a condition of mutual responsibility without in some way losing the dimension of exchange. As in the previous case, I think I can say that it is precisely this absence that produces the conditions both for the relationship to work, “by producing exchange”, and for it not to work, i.e. “it does not produce exchange”. I have found that often, after a first meeting, even a very intense and profitable one, already in the second meeting exchange ceases to be the prime motivation; what emerges is the need to identify some sort of goal that can be pursued together. This obviously implies changes to the relations and setting that not all the participants want or are able to sustain. In short, a more or less explicit conflict is generated which hinders exchange and makes it difficult to find a constructive outlet, often because some find it impossible to commit themselves to something more than holding periodic meetings while others wish to impose their personal or partisan agendas on the small area of common ground created by networking. I think we lacked the instruments to handle the switchover from networking to Gabriella Rossetti's «multiple forms of partnership».⁴³

The third and final limit I wish to mention is connected to the imbalance of power and knowledge that exists among the women involved in networking, especially if some come from the North and some from the South of the

⁴² See Gabriella Rossetti's paper “Geographies of partnership”, published in this book.

⁴³ *ibidem*

world, though this is not the only reason. As we said before, the dissymmetry between the North and the South emerged with great force during the Beijing conference, putting a definitive end to the idea of that “we women” was something that could be taken for granted. However, we all know that imbalances of power and knowledge among women regard a whole range of issues and vary according to the specific situation, that is, they are continuously being modified in space and time. In the specific case of my political involvement in the Italian Women in Black movement, for example, it was the actual launching of a networking project with the Palestinian women's movement that tipped the balance of power within the Italian women's group. Knowledge of English, having the time and money to travel, familiarity with the computer and email, having a certain amount of experience in relations with people from other countries, etc – this is what made the difference, putting the cohesion of our small group of Italian Women in Black at risk. I have to recognise that often we managed to find the instruments to resolve these small crises, but the problem could never be completely resolved. We have to use our common sense to prevent the preventable and we must not be dazzled by the myth of a global “women's” movement which can only exist as a utopia to which the feminist political project can be directed.

Balancing transnational networking and international cooperation

I think that the above clearly shows what my specific interest in the Tamkeen programme was. Can contact with international development cooperation help us to go beyond the limits I found in women's networking between Rome and Jerusalem? And at what price? This was what I hoped to find out in accepting Bianca Pomeranzi's invitation.

I shall now try to sum up my experiences in terms of lessons learnt and recommendations for the future, bearing in mind especially women who, like me, are striking and/or have to strike a balance between the practices of feminist movement and those of development aid projects.

Women's networks and political participation

The promotion of greater women's political participation was an integral part of the Tamkeen programme from the beginning: the general goal was «to contribute to the creation of an environment that is favourable to peace through greater participation of Palestinian women in the political, economic and social life of the country» (MAE/DGCS, 2003). This goal was to be

achieved by means of a strategy that involved valorising the experiences and relations established by Italian and Palestinian women's networking over the last 20 years.

Now, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, a contradiction existed between the general goal – greater participation – and the strategic platform – transnational women's networking – which represented the real challenge faced by the programme, a challenge which involved battling against the constraints of development cooperation rather than exploiting the opportunities for overcoming the intrinsic limitations of women's networking. I will try to explain what I think happened.

If we assume that women's networking is intrinsically a small group activity, involving exchange between individuals, the only possible way to increase the number of women involved in this activity without changing its nature is to increase the number of small groups. If we do this, however, “the need for verticalisation” which emerges from the desire to acquire a greater say in political affairs cannot be met, since it implies to focus on coordination among existing groups rather than on creation of new groups. Now there are operational differences between the two models, horizontal growth and political verticalisation, which make coexistence difficult and a great creative effort is needed to distribute roles and organise relations. It is a difficulty that is well known to those who study the relations between representative and participative democracy, which mirrors the problems encountered in the relations between development cooperation and transnational networking.

Those responsible for the Tamkeen programme devoted a great amount of time and energy into finding organisational solutions to keep the two above dimensions together. The first concrete outcome of this work can be seen in the two women's resource centres⁴⁴ of Bethlehem and Hebron. However, we have to admit that we never reached the phase which Arnstein (1969) calls «citizen power»⁴⁵. Over and above the undeniable difficulties caused by the Israeli-Palestine conflict, this lack of success, I believe, was also due to development cooperation's excessive need for verticality. My argument is that since international cooperation utilises public money, it produces a

⁴⁴ The Tamkeen programme envisaged the creation of district help desks to promote and support women's entrepreneurship. During the course of the programme this aim changed significantly and the *women's resource centres* were used to facilitate political participation of women at the local level.

⁴⁵ This refers to the Arnstein scale.

NON-PARTICIPATION: 1. Manipulation, 2. Therapy

TOKENISM: 3. Informing, 4. Consultation, 5. Placation

CITIZEN POWER: 6. Partnership, 7. Delegated Power, 8. Citizen Control

system of control which can only work if it is based on a few responsible groups and that this need to centralise responsibility, which also inevitably includes the power to make decisions, is in contrast to the widespread autonomy of “practices. In the case of the Tamkeen programme, then, this centralisation of responsibility led to greater decision-making powers being placed into the hands of a small group of women, who also happened to have most women's networking knowledge. The result was that know-how was transformed into power, which effectively blocked exchange with other women.

To conclude, we must realise that the development of participative methods such as «citizen power» involves changes to the power system, which development cooperation is reluctant to accept or will even try to prevent, since it depends on funds provided by nation states and it cannot afford to lose control of these public resources. By this I do not mean to say that the aims of the Tamkeen programme were pointless or were bound to end in failure, but I believe that an awareness of the difficulties involved is fundamental. One has to know that he/she is working within a contradiction, and then has to try to guarantee the conditions for the spread of transnational women's networking practices – increasing the number of small groups as mentioned above – while at the same time attempting to resist development cooperation's centralisation requirements, taking the risk of delegating powers to many groups rather than a single group.

Transnational networking and international partnerships

Although the general aims of the Tamkeen programme make no further mention of participation, the logical framework and subsequent strategic documents make it quite clear that greater participation means the creation of new partnerships: between institutions of different levels, between these and non-government organisations, within the occupied Palestinian territories but also local Italian and Palestinian contexts.

I would like to point out that the decision to opt for «partnerships» rather than «delegated power» or «citizen control», to use the Arnstein scale, is fairly normal in development cooperation programmes and this is due to the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph. In the Tamkeen programme efforts were made to create the conditions for the PNA's Ministry of Women, led by Zahira Kamal, and women's associations to work together or at least work in the same direction. Involving all women in the definition of the “common good” and giving them a say in decisions regarding the use of public resources is another thing altogether, requiring different instruments and, if we look at what happened in the Tamkeen programme, a process which is difficult to achieve under the conditions imposed by current

development cooperation procedures.

Returning to what I thought would happen when transnational networking met international cooperation, I had hoped that any loss in autonomy, which involvement with development cooperation would inevitably bring, could be compensated by a more congenial environment for the development of partnership opportunities, which networking practices were gradually creating. I thought that we would finally have the instruments to progress from individual exchanges to a relationship of mutual responsibility, which I believe is vital for the construction of common projects. Unfortunately it didn't quite go like that, even though the experience enabled us to focus on future issues.

Perhaps what compromised the development of partnerships most was the fact that we were tied to a pact, not always explicitly or obviously, which had been stipulated a priori by the competent ministries of the two nations concerned. This pre-existing pact seriously limited the freedom of choice of the women involved. For instance many decisions taken in the forums set up by the programme, the national Ramallah forum and the local forums of Bethlehem and Hebron⁴⁶, were largely unsuccessful. Although the heads of the programme made every effort to guarantee the greatest amount of flexibility, when it came to allocating resources and setting deadlines, I realised on more than one occasion that many of the proposed activities could not be carried out because of constraints imposed from the outside. The most glaring example of this was the block on the transfer of funds when Hamas took over the PNA government, something that was completely illegal by the standards of international law since the change in government was the result of regularly held elections. And this was by no means the only case in which the wishes of the participants were overruled for reasons of state. Still, the seriousness of this limitation could have been mitigated if people had been made more aware of its existence. If you know the limits to which you are working you can avoid all the labour and frustration of setting up impractical scenarios, and you can negotiate the terms of the limitations.

A more insidious type of problem concerned the limits of space and time, a contingent dimension which characterises women's networking practices. We have already said that the strategies of the Tamkeen programme were based on a pre-existing legacy of experiences and relationships built up over the years by Italian and Palestinian women's networking. Since this legacy is

⁴⁶ The forums of women's associations and institutions were supposed to contribute to the different decision-making phases of the Tamkeen programme, both at the strategic level (national forum) and at the operational level – activities and implementation procedures (local forums).

not abstract but is embodied in a well-defined group of women, the heads of the programme decided that these women should also take charge of the programme. Thus, in the *Memorandum of Understanding* (MAE/DGCS, 2003), the women invited to take part in the programme were defined as «Palestinian women (working both in institutions and in NGOs)». Later, when the national forum was being set up, it was explained that the NGOs were those that included women's empowerment in their statutory aims. This condition excluded any NGOs that did not fully identify with the Platform for Action that emerged from the Beijing conference and included the Palestinian women who had taken part in the conference. The obvious fact that knowledge cannot be separated from the people who possess it, however, meant that attention switched from know-how to individual persons and/or their associations, which would cause quite a few problems in building partnerships. Once the "we women" group, which included the Palestinian women at Beijing in 1995, was relocated to another space and time – the occupied Palestinian territories at the beginning of the new millennium – it became an instrument for the exclusion of other women and an unmanageable conflict which developed among group leaders prevented them from passing on their relational know-how, which was the aim of the intervention.

The real mistake here, I think, was that nobody took into account the impossibility of programming exchange or resultant partnerships. Unfortunately we tend to remember only successful meetings or, to be more precise, we tend to explain existing partnerships as the outcome of previously established exchange relations, so that any attempt which did not result in the establishment of some form of partnership is overlooked. If, on the other hand, we took the trouble to look back at all the meetings held between women, we would realise how few of them actually led to practices of women's networking and how many of these networking practices, which may be fundamental for the empowerment of individuals, came to nothing.

I think we need to realise that the availability of financial and human resources, even when accompanied by appropriate conflict management instruments, is not enough to guarantee the right conditions for the replication of practices that lead to constructive relations. There will always be an element of uncertainty, which is what history is all about, to make the process as unpredictable as it is uncontrollable. If this is so, then development cooperation should recognise ongoing practices and support them for what they are rather than attempt to (re)create relations which are not yet or no longer active. That is how we should interpret the recommendation I made at the end of the previous paragraph: the establishment of the right conditions for the spread of transnational women's networking practices is not achieved

by inviting a few chosen women around a table but by understanding the obstacles faced by women who autonomously decide to meet around a table.

Furthermore we should be aware that very few of these meetings produce partnerships.

Power dissymmetry in networks and partnerships

Let us now turn to the thorny issue of power and the way it is distributed. No cooperation programme can avoid this issue – given the amount of criticism levelled at public development aid over the last few years – but it is a vital when what is at stake is empowerment, as it was in the Tamkeen programme. From the very beginning, the unequal distribution of power, the analysis of the causes and the identification of strategic empowerment factors and instruments to help implement change were central aspects. At least in theory and it is what I expected, since I wished to escape the state of frustration I found my self in after years of involvement in solidarity initiatives. I thought that by taking part in a development cooperation programme for women's empowerment one could uncover the complex system of power relationships and dynamics hiding under the term of “solidarity”, thereby laying the basis for common political action. As time went by, though, I began to realise that working in a women's group environment and for women empowerment was not quite so simple – things are never simple, but in different ways.

Although we all knew about Beijing and all had a lot of experience in developing relations – or perhaps precisely because of this – there was always the dangerous tendency to take for granted the existence of a “we women”, rather than see it as a utopia towards which we could direct our project for change. Fortunately – or perhaps unfortunately – our conflicts brought us back down to earth, but what I remember today as an exciting roller coaster of continuous ups and downs, the illusion of finally having found “home” and the disappointment of discovering that we were nowhere near it, was actually extremely stressful as well as painful. With hindsight I realise that all this could have been easily predicted but yet again, as I said before, the enthusiasm for the opportunities offered by the Tamkeen programme led us to overlook some fundamental steps in the construction of the setting, most importantly we failed to carry out a careful analysis of the risks, which would at least have helped us tackle the problems which we already knew existed from our past experience.

In effect what happened was nothing new. When the issue of empowerment comes up, “we women” immediately rally together because the disempowerment of women is seen as being a product of the other sex. But

as soon as discussion focuses on what each of us understands by empowerment, in the definition of a common horizon for change, this gives rise with equal immediacy to the first divisions. The problem, which is well-known in literature, is that it is not possible to define what is meant by empowerment in absolute terms. «Empowerment is an ongoing process rather than a product. [...] People are empowered, or disempowered relative to themselves at a previous time» (Mosedale, 2003). The different stances each of us have on the various power systems to which we belong inevitably lead not only to an increase in the number of horizons for change⁴⁷ but also reveal the power differentials that exist between one woman and another, to the extent that she could feel disempowered by another. What happens then is that “we women” split into “we Palestinian women” and “we Italian women”, “we institutional women” and “we civil society women”, “we academic women” and “we political women”, etc, forming a sort of jigsaw puzzle which is difficult to put together to produce some form of collective action.

Within this already complex situation, development cooperation acts in two opposing ways. Firstly, because resources are transferred from the rich to the poor, it can be assumed that cooperation takes for granted the existence of an imbalance of power between cooperation partners. The limitations of are well-known. Whether we call the transfer of resources a donation, restitution or compensation, it is never accompanied by more far reaching action aimed at eliminating the structural causes of the wealth of one and the poverty of the other. On the contrary, in most cases these transfers produce dependence-dominance rather than cooperation between equals, to the extent that some observers think that public development aid is a new form of colonisation rather than an instrument of decolonisation. Secondly, the need for donor nations to maintain control on the use of public resources because they are accountable to their citizens means that decision-making powers are placed in the hands of a few, which adds another element of differentiation among the women involved in the cooperation intervention.

Now if on the one hand there is an obvious need to set a specific time and space for the management of inevitable conflicts and also for working groups to establish their own internal rules, I think that all the other conflict factors produced by working within the framework of a development

⁴⁷ I think it is important to define what is “strategic” in women’s empowerment. The prevalent concept used to be C. Moser’s «strategic needs» (1993), in which the term strategic refers to anything in a given society that produces the subordination of «women because they are women»; later there was a shift towards the thinking of N. Kabeer (1999), who held that strategic choices were those «which are critical for people to live the life they want (such as choice of livelihood, whether and whom to marry, whether to have children etc)».

cooperation programme could be considerably reduced by adhering to the rules of good administration. I'll try to explain what I mean in a few words.

From when I first got involved in the Tamkeen programme, I felt a bit schizophrenic because I was being asked to play a double role. Who was I really? an expert in participated local development planning or a political activist with an experience of women's networking between Italy and Palestine? This feeling became stronger as the programme progressed because of the variety of roles I and the others had to play. Now, personally I was delighted that I was not forced to drop one part of my personality and that all of me could participate, despite the contradictions which I would then have to face. I thought this was the only way to fully build on the heritage of women's networking practices, believing that only full participation could turn the network into what Gabriella Rossetti calls a «framework of different partnerships»⁴⁸. But this freedom, which was decided and supported by the heads of the programme, stopped as soon as it came up against the constraints imposed by the needs of development cooperation, with serious consequences for interpersonal relations, which was precisely what the programme was aiming to promote. Some of us, myself included, had two roles in the programme – “network woman” and “cooperation expert” – which cast a shadow over our relations with the others. The situation became particularly distressing for me when it came to summing up a mission in terms of recommendations for the continuation of the programme. On whose behalf was I speaking and how conscious were the other women of the fact that what they told me would then be translated into terms of monitoring and assessment? Sometimes I had the impression that they were more aware of it than I was so that they confided their thoughts in me as if I were a sort of transmission channel to get to that abstract entity, the “donor”, which created in me the unpleasant feeling of being used. At other times they seemed to be completely unaware of the power setup within the group, so that they felt more (or less) constrained than they actually were and, more importantly, they had no understanding of the responsibilities each of us had.

If we add this to the already complex power setup within the group – due to the fact that some were Italian and some Palestinian, some had this knowledge and this interest but not that, some belonged to one social class and not another, etc. – we can image how difficult it was to develop relations. Not forgetting what I said before about needing the right amount of time and space to address these issues, I would like to make a third and final recommendation on this point. To prevent cooperation procedures from

⁴⁸ *ibidem*

pointlessly complicating a relational framework which is already complex, I believe that it is important for all participants to know what their respective roles are towards the donor, so that one is free to take on one's own responsibilities and the others are free to remind her of their responsibilities. In other words, I would like to invite all the women that have the difficult task of, what I have called, "striking a balance between transnational networking and international cooperation" to not forget that if women's networking has its rules, so does development cooperation. Both these sets of rules must be known and respected if we really want to make progress in one area and the other.

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The establishment of a counselling center for women in difficult circumstances in Palestine

Irene Agnello

The work of *Differenza Donna* to stop violence against women

Differenza Donna, a women's ONG for international cooperation on violence against women, was founded in Rome on the 6th of May 1989. Its aim is to shed light on, understand, combat, prevent and overcome all social problems involving women victims. Consequently, the idea of creating anti-violence centers for women in distress and victims of domestic violence, developed and immediately took hold in Italy.

Differenza Donna operates in Italy, where it runs four antiviolence Centres in the city of Rome; in Kaliningrad, Russia, on a training and consultancy basis with other Russian women's organisations to implement programs for the protection of women from gender based violence and to establish anti-violence Centres; and in Palestine where, with the support of Italian Cooperation, the ONG established a Centre against gender and family violence in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem.

The Association is structured as follows: President, Board of Directors, board of Trustees, Members' Assembly. Members can work as volunteers and/or counselors only after having completed a nine-month basic training course on the analysis of gender based violence, that includes theoretical and practical sessions. The course is a cornerstone of our work, and we organize it yearly for new volunteers to attend it, aiming to train potential staff members. Participants include women psychologists, social workers, educators, lawyers and teachers as well as women coming from different background who nonetheless equally wish to study in depth the issue of gender violence and its consequences.

For the ONG and for all of us, this ongoing internal and external training is our specific tool that we use to spread knowledge on the issue, starting from

the actual work experience that we have with the women victims of violence who refer themselves to our Centre. This methodology enables us to maintain a continuous follow up that meets the concrete needs of the moment emerging straightforwardly from the work in the field. Furthermore, it sustains a political approach to the phenomenon. Nonetheless, new research is continuously developed, allowing us to monitor the phenomenon as it manifests in its different forms.

Great attention is given to the phenomenon of migration; to the problems involved in the meeting of different cultures; to discrimination, violence and the injustices that are perpetrated to the damage of the new female work force in our society; to the cultural problems that arise within mixed couples; and to all the social changes linked to the phenomenon of social migration which are yet to be researched and that have led to the emergence of new gender-based manifestations of violence against women.

The work “for change” in the centres: two levels of operation

Our strategy is to make of every Centre for women in distress, a place of rebirth:

- for every woman or child victim of abuse or violence, by providing legal, psychological, social protection and advocacy etc.;
- for the overall society, by fighting the social causes of violence against women and minors, by means of organizing prevention, consciousness raising, research activities, etc.

Innovative concepts of anti-violence Centres:

- All Centres are public spaces. Their activities and the services they offer are publicized to combat secrecy, silence and anonymity, that always shield violence against women and family violence;
- The research that stems from the data and the field experiences collected through the work of the Centres, cooperation with universities, and the “social research lab”, facilitates the continuous creation of new projects that allow the Centre to be a place of live research, as much as to obtain access to funds;
- The concepts of “empowerment” and “horizontality” make these places different from other social services that function on the basis of criteria of assistance, charity and power management;
- The staff's rotating system prevents “burn out” on the job;
- The capacity to create a wide network of volunteers involved in the

Centre's provision of services, enriches professionally the Centre, as well as increases the participation of women;

- Anti-violence centres are innovative places, because they stem from women's initiative and motivation for the advancement of their role within the society;
- Anti-violence centres create abilities to network social support for women and their children at all levels: among women's associations, NGOs, and institutions, within a model affiliation of women who are committed as social actors working on behalf of institutions.

Our invitation is to support women living in other countries to build spaces in defence of all women, for the construction of a pathway of development that sees women leaders as representatives of development in their country, and not as the "disadvantaged and weak categories" to be helped. Accordingly, we propose development plans that respond to the institutional need of the Centres to combat violence against women and peculiarly domestic violence – a phenomenon which is as much widespread as hidden – and that make the work of these centres organized and managed by women, for women (as prescribed by all experiences and international directives on the subject matter). For these purposes, we choose to work with women who may be leaders and are thus recognized by their institutions and can network with development plans that operate in other sectors that concern women, children and families.

An anti-violence centre in Palestine: the background

Why a shelter for empowering families and women in Palestine?

*The term "violence against women" means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*⁴⁹

Women in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt): a vulnerable population

Due to both the ongoing conflict and to internal constraints, women in the oPt face particular challenges:

⁴⁹ Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993.

- *POVERTY*: approximately 11% of the households living on less than \$2 per day, are female-headed. Studies show that due to women's lack of qualifications and opportunities and family obligations, these households are less capable of halting the continuing cycle of poverty and vulnerability;
- *LOW POLITICAL PARTICIPATION*: less than 6% of the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council are women and there are only 2 women in the new Palestinian cabinet. Overall, the institutions of the Palestinian Authority include only 13% of women, which falls below 1% at the local government level. Women account for hardly over 10% of lawyers and less than 9% of judges;
- *SCHOOL DROP-OUT*: reports of increasing early marriages suggest a higher female drop rate once completed the compulsory levels of education, which can eventually lead to worsening economic security and family health. Due to the short course of compulsory education and the worsening economic situation, early marriage contributes to 46% of the drop-out rate for female students, particularly at the secondary level;
- *FOOD INSECURITY*: 368,480 non-refugee Palestinian women are food aid dependent;
- *LACK OF ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES*: 31% of pregnant women are anaemic. Home deliveries increased from 5.2% (2000) to over 30% (2003); between September 2000 and October 2004, 61 women delivered at checkpoints, out of which 36 were stillbirths.

Political violence, humanitarian crisis and domestic violence: an “integrated system of violence” against Palestinian women

The following are extracts from the “Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences”, prepared by Dr. Yakin Erturk for the UN Commission on Human Rights:

(13) *Decades of Israeli occupation of the oPt, use of force and stringent security measures combined with the forms of resistance these provoke have contributed to the creation of an atmosphere of legitimized violence as a method of conflict resolution [...];*

(48) *The death, imprisonment or unemployment of many adult male members of the community, which affects all areas of the oPt, have increased poverty and social tensions that contribute to increased domestic violence [...];*

(49) *Parallel to this, the use of land, water, food, the demolition of homes and the destruction of the general economy as a weapon against the occupied population have resulted in a deterioration of the living conditions in the oPt. Sixty per cent of the Palestinian population reportedly lives under the poverty line [...];*

(13) *At the intersection of occupation and patriarchy, women experience a multilayered discrimination and multiple forms of violence. (UN Economic and Social Council, 2005)*

Types of gender based violence in the oPt:

- *PHYSICAL ABUSE*, such as beating and hitting;
- *SEXUAL ABUSE*, including rape, assault and incest;
- *PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE*, such as verbal assaults and insults, the intentional tarnishing of a woman's reputation through the spread of rumours and gossip, and the reinforcement of negative gender stereotypes;
- *THREAT AND ATTEMPT TO LIFE* until the extreme practice of murder for reasons of "honour" ("honour related crimes").

Gender based violence affects children as well. According to a study conducted by the Birzeit University (Giacaman, 2004), 90% of the Palestinian children suffer from anxiety, stress and various fears related to the violent environment and to increased abuses within the family. International researches share the acknowledgement that children who witness violence report the same traumatic symptoms of those who were directly abused.

A growing phenomenon in the oPt

A study conducted in 2005 by UNFPA shows that the incidence of gender-based violence in the oPt has been evidently increasing during the past five years. In the same year, Amnesty International also reports that:

Palestinian women, human rights organizations, community and social workers, counsellors, physicians and other professionals are concerned that violence against women in the family has increased in the past four and a half years, as the deterioration of the security and economic situation has exacerbated existing problems of gender inequality and control of women in Palestinian society. (Amnesty International, 2005)

In terms of statistics, comprehensive figures on the number of cases of

gender-based violence in oPt are unavailable due to a lack of accurate data collection systems and disagreements over what constitutes violence. However, we report here some figures that we consider relevant:

- In 2004, the Ministry of Women's Affairs reports that 20 women have been murdered for reasons of "honour" and 50 cases of women who committed suicide after undergoing situations of abuse and domestic violence;
- Between 1997 and 1998, WCLAC reported 443 cases of abuse against women and minors; and 2659 cases between 2000 and 2004; in 2002, it documented 31 cases of women killed by family members;
- Between 1996 and 1998, the Family Defence Society of Nablus received 552 cases of abused women and girls – 300 of which have been classified as psychological abuse, 126 physical and 99 sexual;
- The Palestinian Working Women's Society reports an approximate number of 1100 cases received throughout their work;
- In 1996, the Central Police Office in Gaza received more than 420 cases of women and minors victims of domestic violence; in 1997, 621 cases; in 1998, 895 cases. Between 1996 and 1998, 33 cases of women killed by their families were filed, in addition to 273 cases of "suspicious deaths".

Urgency for protection: lack of specialized shelters

Among the various GO/NGO services provided, it was evident the lack of an effective and specific facility to deal with women and minors victims of domestic violence in a qualified and comprehensive way, in accordance to international standards. Until 2001 the only services available were *counselling services with no sheltering opportunity*; and/or *shelters addressed to other kind of beneficiaries* (minors with juvenile problems, abandoned children). Women who were at risk of life could only be hosted in *prisons or police stations* as the only protected places available.

The Mehwar Centre

Since 2001, and upon specific request of some representative of the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) AND of the Italian Cooperation, *Differenza Donna* has provided the expertise necessary to develop and establish the

pilot centre Mehwar⁵⁰ in the oPt: an innovative, pilot and specific answer to the problem of domestic violence in the oPt and Middle East, on the basis of international standards. Between 2001 and 2004 we participated in the project's elaboration and study phases with competent Palestinian authorities. From 2004 to 2007, in partnership with a Palestinian women's NGO – the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) – and in close coordination with MOSA, we implemented the preliminary phase to the opening of the Centre, during which we organized important training activities in Palestine as well as in the Centres managed by *Differenza Donna* in Italy. These included the development of procedures and policies in support of the Centre, community awareness-raising initiatives, and a qualified and continuous side-by-side support of the Centre's new staff in the initial months of activity.

Today, the goal of the project has been fully attained: the Centre is fully operational, and the community has welcomed it and its services with enthusiasm and interest.

From the very beginning, this project has had the great task of creating institutional visibility. This meant establishing the Centre as a new institution able to manage a very delicate role with respect to the cultural sensibility of Palestine.

The project and our representatives have always found great support from Ministers of Social Affairs who have changed throughout the long years⁵¹ that have finally led to the establishment of the Centre. The idea that the Centre serves not only women and children victims of violence, but also provides a number of services for the Community, aiming to become a friendly space to the community, working on prevention as well, was welcomed by institutional offices. It was, however, a bit contrasted by the local partners for fear of too much dangerous exposure. On the contrary, the involvement of the community turned out to be the winning aspect of the Centre's own success, as stated by all parts involved: the Welfare Association (WAC), the Ministry of Social Affairs, Bethlehem community, among others.

The staff working at Mehwar since its opening, is well trained and strongly motivated in the difficult task to run the Centre. The delicacy of managing the many different services that are offered to the community with the aim of building up cooperation, prevention and information on violence against women and children, is having great success. Many are the women of the

⁵⁰ See Annex II: Mehwar Centre for the protection and empowerment of women and families.

⁵¹ The first evaluation mission was realised in 2001.

Bethlehem and Beith Sahour communities who are using the external services with enthusiasm, especially the Gym, the cafeteria and the kindergarten. The same women participate to discussion in the Multipurpose Hall. The local Authorities give their support and respect and collaborate with the Staff.

However, managing partnership relations with the local NGO for the whole duration of the project has been more difficult and less serene due to questions linked to power.

Being used to working differently with institutions and donors, as well as coming from different cultural realities, the two women's organizations encountered many difficulties in sharing the aspects linked to the establishment of those structures of responsibility and power that have to remain foothold of the Centre. In this perspective, I would like to propose some thoughts regarding the peculiarity of women's inter-exchanges within national organisations and particularly when it happens at the international level.

The personal and the political: *differences at work*

Feminist women's networks are much more complicated than those of other organizations. Why? Women's groups and networks began using new and specific methodology starting from the famous feminist statement "the personal is political".

The strength of women's political organisations, that which leads a woman to a feminist way of dealing with politics, is the choice to start out from a personal position, and make this personal position a political tool for the right to justice. A feminist way of dealing with politics always starts from a personal conscience and desire of knowledge and justice, from the need of changing our lives, from women's experiences. In the last century, the feminist movement has made of the feminine hidden work a political and social issue, and it had the great achievement of transforming every day's life personal issues (i.e. care giving) into political issues.

Since the discovery that supporting women's rights and labour, choosing women as beneficiaries, and supporting their projects, gives stronger sustainability and has a long-lasting effect on the society as a whole in terms of welfare, international cooperation programs are more and more focusing their interest on gender projects.

The women's network is becoming stronger and richer but there are still some difficulties. All the women who work in feminist politics, work with

something that is “imaginary”. This imaginary statement is: “Women with women can make change in *politics*”. This is a strong idea which I think all of us share, but at the same time, we must acknowledge that we often clash on it, because it is very difficult to make the imaginary real.

The first feminist statement is: “the personal is political”. But if we speak about “personal” we find ourselves different: as Italian or Christian or Muslim or German or Palestinian, rich or poor, young or mature. And there are many other differences. For this reason, it is important to start to recognise and to work on the gaps that we face when we work as individuals who are different, using this statement as a tool.

But we have to recognise that even if all the women’s organisations theoretically share this principle, when we work together many gaps might arise. So, how to work to bridge this gap? I consider that this can happen only by giving much importance to understand how each organisation is building up its political experience within its political and cultural reality and background; aiming to exchange all the positive and successful experiences as a way of mutually supporting our ideas, in the political context where the projects are implemented.

My experience working with women victims of violence in Palestine in the last 5 years, but also in Italy, my country, where our shelter in Rome gives hospitality to women coming from all over the world (Afghani, Japanese, Moroccan, Tunisian, Algerian, Romanian, Bulgarian...), is that they all come for the same reason: because they suffered violence from men or from the patriarchal culture.

Many foreign women leave their country and come to Italy with the aim of escaping personal and gender based violence. However, once they arrive in Italy, they face similar problems, though maybe hidden under different veils. For this reason many foreign women refer to our Centres in Italy to find a way out of oppression and humiliation. Working in Italy is a very interesting laboratory insofar as we have to deal with different reactions and work on what we call “respect of the other” and even on what we call “inculturization”. In the centres, Italian and foreign women work together to build up new elaborations of the pathways to citizenship.

Different is the situation when we work in international projects. Women who work together in international partnerships very often share main objectives and goals, but their political methodology is often different in terms of internal management as well as of the way relationships with the national government and local institutions are built and maintained. This often leads to misunderstandings that can significantly affect the project management and the capacity to achieve the projects’ goals.

I consider that first of all we have to ask ourselves: what is the main goal of establishing an international partnership? Is it merely to bring money from the “rich” countries to the poor ones? From a feminist perspective this is not the goal. Rather, it is to build up an international network to fight gender based violence, violence against women, and the patriarchal culture that is everywhere, by means of a different strategy that is closer to the different political, social and cultural reality.

Every time that people from other countries and different cultures meet and work together within the same project, they inevitably face conflicts that are entailed in the very cultural, religious, linguistic, and economic differences existing among them. Because of this, I think that it is very important that each project of interchange between women should start from an in-depth knowledge of the methodologies used to succeed in our goals, as well as on a profound analysis of the cultural differences, which must remain *differences*: but not *gaps*.

In light of this, I have a little, practical proposal. When a project begins, even if the designated objectives are clear and agreed upon, it is fundamental to dedicate the initial three months to sharing reciprocal points of views and assessing a shared methodology for ensuring the project's long-term “political sustainability”, which should be considered as a central part of the project: not only on a theoretical level, but rather in a more practical sense. A good practice of work shall always be to consider every cultural and methodological disagreement as an opportunity for deeper exchanges rather than for contrasts. Nonetheless, it is fundamental to work on disagreement, because even though each organization has achieved stability in its own context, exchanges with an NGO coming from another country can offer the richness that stems from mutual comparison and dialogue.

Women's projects are bearers of changes in the balance of the social context: and this is inevitable, in Europe as much as in every part of the world. For example, a project like that of the development of an anti-violence Centre, obliges the women who work in it to interrelate closely with a number of different institutional organs: the social service, the police, law courts, schools, unions, and work places. To succeed at different levels, and in delicate contexts where power balances are uncertain – as is the case of Palestine –, strong cohesion and clarity with the partner NGO is needed.

Therefore, it is my conviction that one of the goals of a project of cooperation among women should also be that of building together the political ability to support our own ideas, starting from the exchange of experiences where both parts listen to learn, adding value to the other's specific experiences. I believe that such an approach, which avoids seeing

“results” as the only objective, may be useful in building grounded methodology for fighting violence against women effectively. The strength of effective political actions which impact favourably on women’s politics potential for success is thus to be found in learning from each other, avoiding the risks of dispersing the project by remaining mutually disconnected, as much as trapped in a patriarchal approach to politics even on social issues related to women.

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Paris, Texas, Tel Aviv: a feminist practitioner's reflection on international cooperation in Palestine in the good governance era

Elena Zambelli

Note from the author

This paper has been written prior to the major events which marked 2007's Palestinian political landscape – namely, the formation of a Palestinian national unity government, and the outburst of the civil war in Gaza. However, I chose not to re-adjust it accordingly, to remind ourselves of the opportunities which, albeit if temporarily, have been dramatically lost; and not least to insist on the relevance of its recommendations in terms of forward-looking, constructive strategies: within and beyond international cooperation.

Introduction

Upon the signature of the Oslo agreements in 1993 and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, massive and ever increasing flows of international aid are channelled to Palestine, mainly to support the peace process and the Palestinian Authority's (PA) institution building (PHDR, 2004: 113). However, the conclusion of the interim period did not lead to the establishment of a Palestinian independent and viable state alongside Israel. Rather, the failures of the peace process fed into widespread malcontent that led to the outburst of the Second Intifada. A Road Map and other failed peace initiatives afterwards, the state of Palestine is still a vanquishing mirage, whereas its ancestor, the PA, has lost the international community's support and is currently facing the dire consequences of a tight international aid boycott.

The year 2005 marked international donors' endorsement of the Paris

Declaration, whereby a set of principles for international cooperation has been unanimously agreed upon: a partner country's ownership of national development policies and strategies; donors' harmonisation and alignment; mutual accountability. Nonetheless, the current scenario in the oPt clearly demonstrates that partnerships' principles crush vis-à-vis the acceptability of the democratic political choices of a partner country. Thus, the Paris-Texas-Tel Aviv connection represents both the main actors of the current international aid boycott and the (Western-driven) *realpolitik* rationales lying behind the hypocrisies of the "good governance" discourse.

However, a mere re-statement of the double standards' embedded in the international relations' system does not lead us very far. Rather, in the persisting Palestinian people's dependency status, international aid is not an option but an impelling need and imperative right. Applying the (western) feminist critique of the public/private divide, what I will do in this paper is to chart the public, private and political spaces for international cooperation in the oPt, assessing past, present and potential performance of the aid system against the objective of Palestinian people's empowerment.

The main conclusion of the paper is that a new politics of international aid is needed if we are effectively to promote the conditions for the establishment of a truly sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel. Peculiarly for what concerns (Western) feminists' standpoints and agency within international cooperation in the oPt, a re-balancing of the gender equality and national independence issues is needed not to prejudice further the legitimacy of the women's human rights and gender mainstreaming discourses. Partnerships across borders have then to be deepened and widened if "othering" processes are to be dismantled, both in the West and in the Rest.

The theoretical framework

Within the Western feminist tradition, the public/private divide has always been conceptualised as a socio-cultural-political construction shielding the reproduction of gender relations of power within the household from state's interference. As such, both the *public* and the *private* spaces are shaped and traversed by politics – as much as political are the challenges to redefine their borders, contents, and legitimate actors⁵². Relocating these spaces within the international aid system, the *private* sphere will subsume "development" practitioner's and concerned individuals' agency within the context of *public* frameworks of aid interventions. First of all, the

⁵² Feminist literature on this issue is extensive: see for example: Moore, 1988; Vogel, 1998.

acknowledgement that the definition, content and intersections between these spaces are unavoidably *political* undermines the separation of “development” from the realm of politics, unmasking the de-politicizing attempts of the “technicalization” of aid. Secondly, it makes space for the emergence of alternative political spaces, understandings and practices – both individual and collective – within as well as beyond the existing public framework of admissible “development” interventions in the oPt.

From my own situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) and multiple levels and experiences of engagement with the persisting Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and peculiarly on its consequences on the lives of Palestinian women, in this paper I will address the following questions:

- What has been the overall impact of international aid on Palestinian people's empowerment?
- In light of the fast-paced deterioration of Palestinian people's living conditions, what strategic priorities should international aid in the oPt pursue in order to enable the establishment a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian state alongside Israel?
- As differently positioned individuals within our own as well as our partner's communities, how do we envision alternative avenues and practices within “development” cooperation at the intersection between private and public spaces for present and future action?
- After the formal collapse of our *public* space for interrelation within development cooperation due to the aid boycott, how do we rethink the key words of solidarity, recognition, reciprocity/accountability and empowerment in order to foster a transparent, mutually accountable and committed partnership between inevitably unequal stakeholders?

In the first section I will outline my own subjective/personal positioning, recalling the fundamental consciousness rifts that shaped my understanding of myself and of myself-with-the-others after taking up the role of “development” practitioner in the oPt. In the second section I will sketch the main characteristics of international aid in the oPt since the advent of the PA, focusing on the impact it achieved in terms of empowering Palestinian people out of structural dependency and vulnerability. In the third section I will address some of the critical *private* tensions experienced by concerned individuals in pursuing solidarity and international cooperation activities within the changed scenario of the second Intifada and its current aftermath. Finally, in the fourth section I will draft some recommendations for alternative political understandings and practices of partnership at the

intersection between public and private spaces for development cooperation in the oPt.

The personal: my own multiple positioning

As a radical leftist and postcolonial feminist, I've always been sensitive to Palestinian people's struggle for their right to self-determination. However, my active engagement with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict kicked off only during my university studies, while writing my final thesis on the tension between gender and national issues within the Palestinian women's movement throughout the first to the second Intifada.

Not least to make some field work, in December 2001 I took the chance to travel to the oPt with the first mission of *Action for Peace*⁵³. That intensive week of visits, meetings and demonstrations with Palestinian women and men leaders, and Israeli women and men peace activists, bolstered my sense of indignation for what was happening. From the anesthetizing space of the news, Palestinian people's suffering moved to the level of personal/political relationships, whereby I felt I ought to be responsible and accountable for what I was doing (including by inaction) to stop it. I translated this urgency "to act" into an intensive cycle of solidarity activities at the local level.

Soon after obtaining my BA I moved to the oPt as expatriate coordinator of a relief and development project aiming to support the political, social and economic empowerment of Palestinian women within the harsh context of the Second Intifada. The shift from an academic and solidarity engagement to the assumption of "managerial" responsibilities at the intersection between donors' requirements and Palestinian women's voices proved painful.

In turn, the multiplicity of the voices and lived realities of the Palestinian women I was encountering forced me to abandon the smooth, essentialist portray of the "united front of Palestinian women" I had built during my early academic and solidarity engagement. The acknowledgement that there was no "average Palestinian woman"⁵⁴ fighting simultaneously on the national and gender equality front, but real women, differently positioned within their society along axis of age, class, political affiliation, citizenship

⁵³ It is a network of Italian individuals and CSOs (peace and women's organizations, political parties, trade unions, associations, etc.) that pursues solidarity activities in the name of a just peace to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

⁵⁴ According to Mohanty (1988: 64) the «average Third World Woman» is an essentialist construction which conflates the multiplicity of women's positionings within a monolithic, ahistorical and universal subject based on a generalized notion of their subordination.

status, family belonging, religion, etc., made me become aware of, as well as revisit, my own personal positioning and cognitive framework.

This emergent complexity pushed me to question women's perceived and desired roles and rights within their own society, feeling that the assumption of gender inequality as each and every Palestinian woman's top priority was a prioritization of my own (cultural) agenda. Striving to silence my white, western, feminist, leftist voice while opening my eyes and ears wide to make a sense of this complexity, I found myself in the vertigo of the «who owns the authentic voice» dilemma (Bracke, 2004: 101). The seemingly impossible task to judge and/or choose among different but equally “authentic” voices left me disempowered. In the acknowledgement of the partiality of all perspectives and positionings, I questioned not only the role I was taking up by engaging in “development” cooperation in Palestine, but overall I started to deconstruct the objectives, means and strategic priorities constituting the *public* framework of international cooperation in the oPt.

The public space: international aid in the oPt

Out of the general critiques which could be levelled against the politics and governance of the aid system, there are at least three important factors which are peculiar to the Palestinian case: 1) the de-politicizing impact of aid on Palestinian CSOs; 2) the adverse tension between relief and development interventions in the persisting Israeli military occupation of the oPt; and 3) the peace process conditionalities.

During the first Intifada (1987-1993), the organization into popular committees constituted the backbone of the survival as well as resistance strategy of the Palestinian people living under occupation⁵⁵. The establishment of the PA in 1994 marked a critical watershed: on one side, the PA became a formidable catalyst as well as competitor for aid; on the other, it centralised the welfare and representative functions which had been previously held by Palestinian CSOs. In order to have access to international aid, many of the existing CSOs adopted the legal status of NGOs, whereas many others flourished during the interim period. However, aid did not come free of conditionalities, nor donors' agendas had been locally negotiated. Caught in the spiral of responding to demanding donor's requirements, many lost track of the community-organizing and representational functions that inspired their early foundation. Activists and supporters became respectively NGO's staff and project's beneficiaries. The prospects of securing access to

⁵⁵ See for example: Dajani, 1994; Augustin, 1993; Hiltermann, 1991.

international funding stimulated a fierce competition between previously cooperative socio/political organizations. Overall, much was lost due to the de-politicizing attempts to transform Palestinian NGOs into subsidiary service providers. In many cases, the politics that survived was not much more than the NGOs' directors' political affiliation⁵⁶.

Simultaneously, the main international aid's axis of intervention did not seem to tackle the socio-economic-political obstacles constraining Palestinian people's lives, but rather to act well within the limits derived by the persisting Israeli occupation. Since the establishment of the PA, the amount of aid to the oPt has been impressive, with an average per capita assistance of \$310 in the period 1994-first semester of 2004 (PHDR, 2004: 113). The outburst of the second Intifada made the total aid per year double⁵⁷, whereas its sectoral allocation was deeply restructured to respond to the severe social and economic consequences provoked by the re-ignited conflict⁵⁸. However, there is one significant exception to this reshuffling/restyling of aid: war or (relative) peace notwithstanding, the share of development assistance allocated to the productive sectors (agriculture and enterprise development) remained unchanged⁵⁹, totalling 2.8% throughout the 1999-2004 period:

| | 1999-2000 | | 2001-2004 | | 1999-2004 |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Total \$ million | Share of the total (%) | Total \$ million | Share of the total (%) | Share of the total (%) |
| Development | 930.50 | 88.10 | 1,163.20 | 28.40 | 40.67 |
| <i>of which:</i> | | | | | |
| - <i>agriculture</i> | 19.61 | 2.11 | 30.46 | 2.62 | 2.39 |
| - <i>enterprise development</i> | 40.80 | 4.38 | 54.06 | 4.65 | 4.53 |
| - <i>infrastructure</i> | 389.53 | 41.86 | 373.57 | 32.12 | 36.45 |
| - <i>human resource development</i> | 177.78 | 19.11 | 277.53 | 23.86 | 21.75 |
| - <i>others</i> | 302.78 | 32.54 | 427.93 | 36.79 | 34.90 |

⁵⁶ On the NGOization of the Palestinian CSOs and women's movement, refer to: Hammami et al., 2001; Johnson and Kuttub, 2001.

⁵⁷ From ½ billion USD\$ per year during 1994-2000; to 1 billion USD\$ during 2000-2003 (UNCTAD, 2006: 37).

⁵⁸ Prior to the Intifada (1999-2000), 88.1% of total aid to the PA was allocated to the development sector; 9.4% to emergency; and only 2.6% for budget support. In the following 4 years (2001-2004), the share of budget support peaks to 42.6%, emergency funds triple (from 9.4% to 29%), whereas the share of development assistance decreases of 2/3 (from 88.1% to 28.4%) (see Table 1).

⁵⁹ Prior to the outburst of the Intifada (1999-2000), agriculture and enterprise development are respectively allocated 2.11% and 4.38% of the total development assistance (total: 6.49%); in the following period (2001-2004) their share is 2.62% and 4.65% (total: 7.27%) (see Table 1).

| | | | | | |
|----------------|----------|--------|----------|--------|--------|
| Emergency | 99.00 | 9.40 | 1,186.00 | 29.00 | 24.96 |
| Budget Support | 27.20 | 2.60 | 1,742.10 | 42.60 | 34.37 |
| Total | 1,056.60 | 100.00 | 4,091.20 | 100.00 | 100.00 |
| Annual average | 528.30 | | 1,022.80 | | |
| Grand total | 5,147.80 | | | | |

Table 1 – Donor support to the PA by major category and sectoral allocation, in million USD\$ and percentage⁶⁰

12 years after the establishment of the PA, it is not surprising to acknowledge its extreme vulnerability vis-à-vis the current international aid boycott. Short term assistance needs have been clearly prioritised over long term objectives of self-sustainability and empowerment: the latest UNCTAD report (2006: 17) states that the PA is «effectively locked in a situation of increased dependence on official development assistance for financing current and capital expenditures».

Not least, both the quantity and quality of aid to the oPt have been thoroughly influenced by the extent of progress in the peace process. During the Second Intifada, along with a steep increase in the assistance channelled through direct budget support, came also more good governance conditionalities (UNCTAD, 2006: 37), which included donors' plight for transparency and accountability in the management of aid, as well as the Quartet's recommendation to the PA's set for the first phase of the Road Map⁶¹. The concern for the potential volatility of aid was clearly voiced in the 2004 Palestinian Human Development Report: «What if the peace process, based on the assumption of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in accordance with United Nations resolutions, is ended? What options are available to the donors and the Palestinians in this case?» (2004: 149).

The Quartet's boycott following the new Palestinian government's refusal to abide by the three conditions set afore by the donors community to continue their support – 1. commitment to non-violence; 2. recognition of Israel's

⁶⁰ Adapted from: Table 4.1 “Donor support to the PA by major category”, UNCTAD 2006: 37 (which includes support to UNRWA but not to NGOs); and Table 4.3 “Development assistance to the PA and its sectoral allocation”, UNCTAD, 2006: 38

⁶¹ Including: rebuild and refocus the PA's security apparatus, reporting to an empowered Interior Minister; produce a draft constitution “based on strong parliamentary democracy and cabinet with empowered prime minister”; complete “further steps to achieve genuine separation of powers”; hold free, open, multiparty and fair elections.

right to exist; 3. acceptance of existing agreements⁶² – proves quite an eloquent answer to this dilemma. The US, the EU and the other major donors have since cut or withheld their assistance to the PA⁶³, whereas Israel is withholding \$75 million per month of duties and VAT on foreign imports (including Israeli goods and services) destined to the PA.

The refusal to adopt a «policy of gradual, conditional engagement» as suggested by an analysis of the International Crisis Group prior to the elections (2006: i); the dismissal of the partnership commitments endorsed in the Paris Declaration (2005); and the denial of Palestinian people's democratic agency «against a backdrop of years of allegations of widespread corruption, fraud and mismanagement in the ruling elite» (Hasselknippe, 2006: 33; see also Shikaki, 2006: 6), well represent the hypocrisies of the good-governance discourse and the double standards embedded in Western countries' rhetoric of democracy. Whereas Israel continues to ignore many UN Security Council and General Assembly dispositions (including the International Court of Justice's ruling on the Separation Wall), «the Palestinian people have been subjected to economic sanctions – the first time an occupied people have been so treated» (HRC, 2006: 3).

Ironically, some of the reforms pushed by the Quartet onto the PA during the presidency of Yasser Arafat – the shift of executive powers to the premier; the Interior Ministry's responsibility for the security apparatus; and the impossibility of the president to dissolve the PLC – are now showing their double-edge: the presidency does not hold any constitutional, legitimate power to get out of the present stalemate⁶⁴.

Almost one year after the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections, and at the eve of a disastrous civil war, 40% of Palestinian live below the official poverty line (\$2.10/day); 40% are unemployed; 23% of the employed are unpaid due to the cut to PA staff's salaries; and also NGOs have registered a significant contraction of funds (HRC, 2006: 3).

Acquiescent or unwilling, it is within this *public* framework of international aid in the oPt that we are forced to situate our *private* search for less unequal

⁶² The EU Council and the Quartet laid down the three principles in their statement of 30 January 2006, which have been so far the benchmark against which to measure progress and the possibility of re-opening the aid channels.

⁶³ On the 26th April 2006 the EU decided that assistance to, or through, the Palestinian government and its ministries has been put on hold; the US has cut \$300 millions previously allocated within the fiscal year 2006.

⁶⁴ According to the Palestinian Basic Law, the President can issue decisions and decrees that have the power of law in exceptional cases, but have to be confirmed by the PLC or will decay (art. 60); s/he can declare the state of emergency by a decree (art. 103) but cannot suspend or dissolve PLC nor the Basic Law's very provisions (art. 104).

personal/political relationships with our Palestinian partners.

The private space: who sees/produces whom?

The international reactions to the victory of Hamas proved to be a test not only for donors' commitment to *their* principles of good governance and democracy, but also for concerned individuals' understanding and practice of "solidarity with the Palestinian people". Suddenly, a majority of "others", with whom no relationship had ever been established, was brought afore into the political and social arena.

This feeling of dismal was particularly felt among women, who feared the new government would have curtailed Palestinian women's freedoms and rights. Especially to us – foreign feminist activists, academics, development practitioners, etc. – the new scenario was peculiarly dark, as much as unknown were its inhabitants. Who were these women supporting, voting and/or being elected for Hamas? What were their priorities and uncompromising values? Could we find any commonality between us? Simultaneously, this political earthquake catalysed a latent reflection on the issue of "recognition", whereby our selective blindness was being called into question: who did we acknowledge as our "privileged testimonies" to whom we had delegated most of our understanding of "the situation"? Who did we systematically ignore, and why?

However, visible signs of foreign activists' and concerned individuals' failures of recognition had already emerged during the Second Intifada, that differed strikingly from the first in terms of means used, dynamics of participation and exclusion, etc. The militarization of the revolt undoubtedly constituted the factor that challenged activists' and concerned individuals' former unitary and uncontested stance "in solidarity with the Palestinian people". Their imagery of Palestine, its people and their struggle, could not be easily accommodated with the changing conditions on the ground and particularly with the active use of violence as a means of protest. Prisoners of the life and struggle they had witnessed and/or took part into during the first Intifada, many among them resisted to change by shutting themselves up into the comforting though ever-restricting environment populated by the privileged testimonies of their own (and not necessarily the testimony's) "good old times". At least temporarily, the selective blindness of the (western) eye allowed the distant viewers not to question their own assumptions about what was to be deemed legitimate, appropriate, useful and what was not.

In turn, the complicity of those who mirrored back the image that the

western eye was expecting to see should not go unmentioned. Inasmuch as foreign solidarity and support were badly needed, many differences across borders were being silenced – not last because the “privileged testimonies” who chose not to censor themselves and/or not to agree with the “view from outside/from above” risked to be pushed to the margins. This is not meant to glorify the “view from within/from below” as inherently just and legitimate. Nonetheless as feminists not only should we be aware of the partiality of all perspectives, but we should also be encouraged to listen to, talk *with and within* the spaces of differences.

Today, the relevance and extent of the socio-political changes occurred in the oPt since the first Intifada cannot be ignored anymore. Change has visibly erupted before we could critically reflect on the state of our personal/political relationships with our Palestinian partners within as well as beyond the public space of “development” cooperation. A national unity government could provide an easy though temporary way out of the dilemma of recognition – bringing our “good old partners” back on the main political stage. However, I think we should be wary of re-producing and acting upon a reality which does not exist anymore, not least because the legitimacy of our own agency – as activists, “development” practitioners, academics, etc. – will presumably be affected by the international aid’s boycott. How otherwise could we go back to promote dialogues and exchanges around democracy, human rights, peace and gender issues, if we did not seriously ask ourselves what went wrong in the past and why?

As differently situated individuals with unequal access to material and immaterial resources, power relations between us cannot be erased, but only assumed responsibility for. This demands identifying new public/private avenues for political agency within as well as beyond international cooperation to be pursued on the basis of a re-found partnership between us which could effectively be transparent, committed and mutually accountable.

The political: milestones for the re-foundation of a public/private partnership

The starting point of my conclusions is that double standards and hypocrisies notwithstanding, the vulnerabilities of the PA and the Palestinian people to the international aid boycott demonstrate that the aid industry is still long to stay in the oPt. I do not know whether it will take short or long before the aid channels are re-opened – nor can I forecast the human, social and political costs of the political alternatives out of the present stalemate. Nonetheless, be it a national unity government, a civil strife, new elections or else, the

status quo is not a long term option. Thus, as differently situated, engaged individuals, the choice we are left with is to continue to be engaged in international cooperation in the oPt or to opt out: but the aid industry will stay.

Assuming that working from within a given structure or system can provide opportunities which are denied to those who are at the outside (and vice versa), I will not call for projects' divestments due to the impossibility of erasing power differentials between us. Rather, I will outline two main recommendations that I consider essential for the re-foundation of a political partnership with Palestinian women and men both within and beyond existing public/private frameworks of interrelation.

In the public space: re-balance the national and gender issues in our projects and exchanges

The first recommendation is that we should acknowledge that you cannot make international cooperation (for "development"?) in Palestine "despite" the Israeli occupation. If we assume that the overall purpose of aid should be to become unnecessary for a country's self-sustainability, the fundamental constraints to Palestinian's economic development have to be removed. According to the 2006 UNCTAD report, these are: a) absence of national sovereignty; b) Israel's strategy of asymmetric containment⁶⁵; c) settlements and the Wall; d) limited domestic markets; e) obstructed regional and global integration; f) limited policy room-for-manoeuvre. Thus, the relevance of concepts and practices of "empowerment" should be evaluated against the provision of spaces, options and means to challenge the constraints derived by the encroaching Israeli occupation.

Now more than ever, an unbalanced focus on the governance performance of the PA's institutions (which nonetheless have been established in a temporary fashion) is unlikely to re-generate trust, transparency and commitment in our partnerships. The same can be said for people-to-people activities for the promotion of human rights, democracy, gender equality, peace, etc. When the power-holders make visible recourse to coercion in order to maintain their dominion, ruling by consensus becomes harsh: the mounting socio-cultural-political clash between the two monolithic blocs of

⁶⁵ Khan's definition of asymmetric containment (2003) describes a strategy to enforce PA compliance by creating huge penalties for non-compliance: restrictions on people and goods movements; control of international borders; control of PA fiscal revenues, etc. In turn, «asymmetric economic control facilitates compliance with [Israel's] security and political goals. This means that attempts to foster economic development [...] have to deal with an externally imposed institutional architecture that maintains the vulnerability of the Palestinian economy.» (UNCTAD, 2006: 3).

the West and the Rest should not be underestimated.

This is not to say that these spaces for interrelation and/or international cooperation should be abandoned. However, if we are guided by a genuine commitment to promote the conditions for Palestinian people's (own) empowerment, we have to think strategically about aid: if the Israeli occupation is what lies at the roots of Palestinian people's ever-increasing vulnerabilities and dependency status, the share of development assistance allocated to productive sectors has to be radically increased. As suggested in the UNCTAD report (2006), import substitution strategies could prove useful so as to decrease domestic market's dependency by Israel while providing productive (and not parasitic/assistentialistic) job opportunities. In this vein, aid is conceived of as a temporary mean versus a systematic corrective/charitable measure. Thus, economic empowerment acquires a strategic political dimension, whereby the challenge to Israel's policy of asymmetric containment constitutes the economic, political, social and fiscal leverage on which to build a viable, democratic and sovereign state of Palestine.

Being a radical leftist and feminist development practitioner, I am aware that my suggestion to adopt a strategic focus on economic empowerment as a leverage to expand the self-sustainability perspectives of the future Palestinian state could look awkward. However, throughout these years I've matured the conviction that, as foreign feminists, we have not been able to find a proper balance between gender and nationalist issues in our dialogues, exchanges and projects with Palestinian women. Surely the prioritisation of women's equality concerns is not only due to our own (western) positioning, but it legitimately follows from the post-independence institutional settings of other post-colonial states – Algeria being the closest example. Nonetheless, while claiming that national and social issues should go hand in hand, we might have lost track of the independence and self-sufficiency goals. Eventually, we could have involuntarily contributed to exposing our partners to accusations of divisiveness, selfishness, Westernization, etc, overall weakening the strengths of the social agenda's platforms.

Rather, acknowledging that our interlocutor's multiple identities can and do minimally accommodate both nationalist and gender equality concerns, a binary though synergetic focus between the two platforms could prove more effective. Thus, a renewed emphasis on women's economic empowerment could serve to facilitate their empowerment *as women*, and *as Palestinian women*. Similarly, gender mainstreaming and women's human rights promotion would be more effective if a synergetic focus between the national and the social platform is maintained. I consider that combining a concrete commitment to facilitate Palestinian people's empowerment out of

their dependent status with our concerns for gender equality, could prove a fundamental milestone in the re-foundation of a post-boycott partnership between us.

In the private space: think critically about our partnerships

My second recommendation is that we have to learn to get involved into dialectic versus preconceived dialogues and exchanges within and beyond our long-established partnerships.

At the basics, this implies that we allow our current partners and privileged testimonies to express themselves as freely as possible, striving to reduce the distortions provoked by being considered as potential “vehicles for aid”. A truly committed and transparent partnership demands that we allow our differences to emerge and be accommodated rather than to suppress them not to disappoint each other. In building a dynamic relationship capable of reacting to changing conditions, cognitive dissonances should not lead to “retaliation” but to an improved mutual understanding.

Secondly, we should acknowledge that as much as our own positioning is partial and subjective, and our identity is multiple, so is that of our interlocutors. This implies that we should relieve our “privileged testimonies” of the burden – as well as the privilege – of representing/performing the «authentic insiders» (Narayan, 1997). Neither they nor we can embody the wholeness of our own society's complexities free from subjective positionings, contradictions and/or conflict of interests stemming from different political affiliations, personal rivalries, class biases, etc..

Thirdly, in order to deepen our outsiders' understanding, we have to learn to recognise and get involved with new interlocutors, as seemingly distant as they can appear. This demands the concrete versus rhetoric capacity to put our own assumptions, beliefs and practices at play on equal footing with those of our different interlocutors. If we fail and/or refuse to do it, the selective blindness of our Western, feminist eye will continue to reproduce and act upon a static reality that exists merely in the mirror – overall failing to keep up with the inevitability of change. Particularly for what concerns gender issues, I consider that today more than ever we should learn to engage in a dialectic discourse with women belonging to the political-religious camp – not last because religious beliefs traverse rather than divide the political parties' spectrum. Acknowledging that the outright double standards of the international relations system can and do affect the legitimacy of an international conventions' discourse on women's human rights, we would rather try to build bridges and synergies with Islamic

feminism discourses if we are to promote and mainstream the respect of fundamental women's human rights.

Finally, the reciprocal accountability of our partnerships with Palestinian women – but not only – should not be measured merely in terms of the quantity and quality of the public/private commitments honoured within the oppressed country. Rather, our outsiders' responsibilities have to include a comparable commitment to change the very same dynamics that produce marginalisation and oppression within our own as well as the others' countries. This demands concrete actions to contrast racism as well as the rising wave of hysteric Islamophobia that is poisoning the West since 9/11, whereby alliances with networks of migrant women should be considered not least as fundamental socio-cultural-political leverages to dismantle "othering" processes.

It is not rhetoric to conclude saying that as Western feminist – activists, academics, "development" practitioners or else – we need to succeed in the re-foundation of a transparent public/private partnerships across borders at least as much as our interlocutors, friends, allies and partners do.

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Voices from the Mediterranean basin

Women's networking and international cooperation across the Mediterranean

Maria Grazia Ruggerini and Monica Mancini

Equality and differences in partnership relationships

The backdrop of these notes is a story: the story of an initiative launched over ten years ago by the “Istituto per il Mediterraneo” (IMED, *Institute for the Mediterranean*) with women from the Maghreb, Africa. Women from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia who work within women's and feminist associations and trade unions, or individual activists, intellectuals, and with whom there are shared interests and motivations.⁶⁶ An initiative concerning women's citizenship rights that started in the mid-90s.

Not coincidentally, the starting point has been a research project which allowed women from both shores of the Mediterranean to build together a common network to support future actions and confront their reciprocal experiences within European, and especially Italian, feminism, and North African feminism.

As a starting point, the issue of citizenship rights has been subsequently articulated into different stages and expanded, up to the recent inclusion of the theme of women's economic empowerment, as well as the fight against violence against women within and outside the family. Such is the context that led to the creation of the MedEspaceFemmes network, as the outcome of activities shared for over a decade by women living on both shores of the Mediterranean.

Thus, in participating to this workshop we cannot avoid situating ourselves geographically and historically as part of the Euro-Mediterranean area: a region we wish to perceive not only as a conjunct of several countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, but also as a territory whose borders vary

⁶⁶ For further information concerning the projects, see: www.medespacefemmes.net, as well as Annex III: The Med Espace Femmes Network: a partnership between the two banks of the Mediterranean.

with the changing of times, within which the Gulf States, Europe right up to the Urals, and Mauritania (bridging Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa) are also included. Nonetheless, over ten years have passed since the Barcelona Declaration, and its substantial failure in fostering partnership between European and Southern Mediterranean countries does not facilitate the recovery of the strategic importance of the Mediterranean basin.

This uniting – and at times dividing – sea allows us to identify elements of connections, of linkages between the “here” and “there”, tracing a sort of “Mediterranean model” characterised by the metissage that extend beyond the specificities of each Mediterranean country. However, the risk entailed in acknowledging a “Mediterranean model” should not be underestimated. In fact, the presence of different though persisting patriarchal cultures, which remain deeply rooted despite several attempts striving to delegitimize them, could contribute to the consolidation of stereotyped roles and to the ghettoisation of women, imprisoning them into the endless reproduction of “female” tasks. To evade this trap, we should not hesitate to consider every facet of the issue as well as refraining from perceiving the female universe as a world in itself.

In this perspective we acknowledge the importance of having women from the North and from the South sharing some studying and reflection times as a starting point. In terms of project management, such experience has achieved great success, as a way to cross borders between the northern and southern shores, recalling empirically the spirit of border studies, which are centred on a research-action methodology.

This is also another way of ensuring the continuity of dialogue within each group as well as between “them” and “us”: observing each subject’s history and discourse without denying their relationship with memory and time, with the present and the past. From here stems the possibility to identify a common ground to plan, act and fight together to solve problems affecting territories and peoples transversally, thereby preventing ourselves from being locked into a kind of material and symbolic ghetto, together with the “foreign” women who live on the other side of the Mediterranean, or with women migrants residing in our country.

We are now bound to make the effort to understand theoretically and pragmatically women from other countries – in this specific case, women living in the Maghreb area – providing them with every opportunity to highlight and sometimes rediscover and valorise their history and contemporaneity, as well as understanding the particular significance of political customs beyond stereotypes and prejudice. This is ever more crucial at a time in history marked by a dangerous rhetoric on women of a “generic”

and indistinct Muslim Arab world, which risks fostering stereotypes and prejudices in the wake of the persistent Orientalism – opposed to perhaps even worst forms of Westernism –, that culminates in the omnipresent debate on the Islamic veil.

This is the context within which we are to frame the theme of “Women’s Networking and International Cooperation”. First of all, we wish to focus on the term “partnership”. Obviously, we do not consider its goal as the setting up of a network to “assist” women on the other shore of the Mediterranean, but rather the mutual stimulation of dialogues, working hand in hand to gain greater visibility and relevance, uncovering the precious presence of women in society – and politics – as well as the cultural values of which they are bearers and advocates.

Once discarded the illusion of a smooth equal management of partnership relations, but avoiding feelings of guilt, it is vital to focus critically on the risk of establishing asymmetrical relationships stemming by the way money flows and is managed, rather than by the remnants of colonial cultures. This includes the difficulty of ensuring truly participative agency, because of the very structure of north-south cooperation projects as well as due to the ambivalences of the processes they originate. Experience has shown that truly equal exchanges require acceptance, valorisation, debate, and the capacity of being critical about the “others” as much as about oneself.

An effective partnership should envisage opportunities for neighbouring countries to move beyond (the continuity of) commercial and economic exchanges: gaining in-depth mutual knowledge, stimulating the uprooting of stereotypes and prejudices, identifying new lenses through which re-read our reality and re-think ourselves, with the willingness to produce change as much as to change oneself. This can be achieved, i.e., valorising studies, researches and their outcomes; organising cultural initiatives; elaborating common objectives and platforms; organising exchanges among associations, local governments, etc. We need a sort of “intelligent sensitiveness” to accept our own, reciprocal partiality, thus opening ourselves to the possibility of erasing the “negativity” that has set us one against each other – an attitude that should also prevail in the relationships that local partners establish among themselves.

Furthermore, we believe that effective networks can only be constructed adopting non-dogmatic approaches. What does this imply, concretely speaking? How does this translate into daily practice? In our opinion, it means allowing space for and accepting complexity and plurality, in mutual respect. In the same time, we consider that media’s overwhelming depiction of the North-South, East-West contraposition, is anachronistic. In fact,

nowadays these very universes are characterised by great mobility and far from being internally homogeneous, are rather traversed by numerous differences. Similarly, individuals are characterised by different though simultaneous and multiple belongings, that make it impossible to juxtapose the monolithic depiction of a Northern woman's identity *vis-à-vis* a Southern's. The transversal multidimensionality and plurality that we are witnessing in the Mediterranean basin constitutes the foundation for the establishment of more equal relationships.

It is precisely because of our "different differences" that neither "they" nor "we" can speak in the name of the other. Nonetheless, the "net-work" entails that both "parts" remain open to even slight and partial changes of each own understanding and interpretation of the reality. Without forgetting it, we must also strive to move beyond our partiality, so as to speak about the world, acting with an ethics of responsibility that acknowledges limits and relativity, and allowing for the creation of "incarnate connections" capable of affecting reality on the basis of the criteria of what is possible.

If we start from the conviction that no "civilisation" can be imposed nor proposed, it becomes more natural to refrain from establishing relationships where subjects appear to be means for reaching "other" objectives. Rather, they themselves remain "objectives" – as individuals and as members of the communities that they represent – in a pathway of cooperation made of micro-actions (within wider networks), whose purpose is to "alter relationships among countries and people", and possibly to recover an ancient, though not outdated, hypothesis of synergic co-development geared to ensure a shared, balanced growth. This is not meant to identify definitive strategies, but rather to delineate transitional projects geared to build a "new multilateralism", within which to foster dialogues among civil society, local institutions and central governments.

Up to this point, our discourse has been quite general, not to say "neutral": it could pertain to both men's and women's networking. Let us instead consider the topic from a *gender perspective*. In the last ten years, in conflict with the market-imposed globalisation process that we nevertheless intersect, we have been experiencing the globalisation of movements and political struggles, which could also somehow boost the capacity of international women's movements. This general process can be interpreted from specific angles, pinpointing commonalities that can prove important to establish long-lasting ties between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Allow us to mention a couple of them.

First is the common denominator represented by the patriarchy, which directly as well as indirectly, and to different extents, prevents women, who

constitute over fifty percent of the population, from asserting themselves vis-à-vis the other half (i.e. men) neither in terms of equal rights and weight, nor in terms of expressing and safeguarding specific ways and contents. Patriarchal culture is still too often exercised in contexts that appear to be “neutral”, by means of the use of violence in the public sphere and even more often in the private one, within the family. This is a starting point that can be assumed to be shared by women in a trans-national perspective.

On the other hand, if we try and understand the positive side of the issue, we observe a common trend in different parts of the world, which is the emerging protagonism of women in both the public and the private spheres, that signals their enhanced awareness of the roles they play in the civil and political society – be they visible or “invisible”, acknowledged or disregarded, in more or less dramatic contexts. From here stems women's shared capacity to defend their own rights and claim freedom for themselves – and consequently for all citizens – which is rooted in their own histories and experiences of incomplete citizenship, as much as in the need to resist discourses and power that appear to be “neutral” but are rather masculine.

Thus, such evidence yet again stresses how senseless it would be to draw a line separating the “North” from the “South” of the world. Today, women's view cannot contemplate a “full” democracy going elsewhere to teach others what is to be done. On the contrary, it supports the dialogue and exchange of experiences and differences, in order to build more equal societies in which citizenship rights are respected for both women and men, and where the safeguarding of specificities cannot be tantamount to perpetuating women's inferior status in terms of fundamental human rights.

Networking implies as well observing ourselves and our universes from a different and less uncompromising perspective, refraining from viewing the others – i.e. women who live on the other shore of the Mediterranean, or who are migrants in our countries – as strangers or foreigners. It also means considering each universe in the plurality of subjects that populate it, as much as characterize each individual's subjectivity. It also means acknowledging its dynamism, and the *metisage* of its origins.

We do not intend to trivialize the situation, by assuming simplistically that women throughout the world share the same problems. On the contrary, far too long women's movement's search for a unity that could gain them greater strength might have concealed differences, risking to provoke serious misunderstandings.

Thus, while on the subject of networks of cooperation between the North and the South of the Mediterranean, emphasis is essentially placed on convergences and similarities, supporting the dialogue among cultures and

the search for common pathways; other issues might be more difficult to share and differences to bridge – naming for example the theme of the culture of the body and sexuality.

Whether we like it or not, working with women from other countries on the issue of rights has further entailed addressing – perhaps from a pragmatic rather than a theoretical angle-view – the question of universalism, and the need for critically reviewing it without lapsing into relativism nor into the celebration of difference: in other words trying to search for a “third way” that can allow coexistence and cohabitation. This requires being less uncompromising, while at the same time creating a common framework for sometimes differing projects.

These are opportunities also for us, Western women, to re-think a sort of “contextual universalism”, grounding the abstractness of principles into social, cultural and political contexts – in other words, into everyday life – and allowing space for women's willingness to enter the public sphere as gendered versus neutral individuals. Women thus become “anomalous” beings who enter the polis through an inside-outside movement, ceasing to be strangers.

Cooperation and “empowerment”

But what contents and objectives can prove relevant to establish women's networks in the framework of cooperation projects? In fact, some of the key words that have become popular since the Beijing Conference risk remaining mere slogans unless they are “reinterpreted” according to the differing and specific contexts.

The word *empowerment* – as well as *mainstreaming*, though for other reasons – is one of those that ran the risk of being so all-inclusive to become devoid of any meaning; or else to be used to mask generic policies containing merely abstract references to “women”. Instead, we believe that the objective of *empowerment* can form a skeleton, a main thread and crucial content in the creation of women's networks: provided that its significance is out-spelled.

Originally, to *empower* means to grant someone the authority to do something. In our projects, we have always perceived a kind of twofold movement: to grant authority on the basis of eminence, but also to start by bestowing authority on ourselves. This concept is rooted in a process of awareness and self-esteem, from which the notion of “conceding authority” implicitly entailed in the original Anglo-Saxon verb derives or intersects. A

twofold movement that entails both the public and the private, the individual and the collective, with the purpose of “imposing” new forms of female eminence and power in the economic, social, political and family spheres: not as a quantitative “plus”, but as a qualitative variable that upsets and creates turmoil in decision-making and government mechanisms, thereby in the very definition of power.

If we restrict ourselves to the context of our work and attempt a definition of the concept according to the concrete strategies we experimented, some further details related to our past experience could prove useful. Processes aiming at real *empowerment* should first of all focus on “self-esteem”, on the consolidation of the self towards becoming an autonomous subject endowed with freedom of choice. That is the starting point for turning the initial female estrangement into eminence and power, both in the public and the private spheres. One first, concrete step in everyday life, consists in enabling women to recover their freedom of expression, to have access to education and to have their knowledge valorised, so as to contribute towards radical changes of mentalities.

Furthermore, an indispensable part of an *empowerment* process consists in finding tools for effectively “conciliating” family (in some cases, much more than private) and professional life, as much as respecting and acknowledging domestic and care work, including from an economic point of view. This can give rise to direct and indirect capacity to acquire influence within the family, that can possibly expand synergistically to the social and political spheres, providing mutual and sustainable support. There is no doubt that in order to elude the power of patriarchates and to establish relationships with men from a position of freedom and with greater bargaining power, it is crucial that women be relieved from primary material needs. Only in this way it is possible to discard the role of the “weak woman”, opening the way to a difficult and uneven process for the expression of female strength in a context of “multidimensional freedom”.

If the purpose of networking is to acknowledge and develop what typically belongs to the experience and heritage of women, should it not also entail, for instance, how to enhance and increase their capacity of understanding human beings, participating, soliciting and supporting relational life? Lastly, another open issue: in an *empowerment* process, what kind of relation do women build among themselves at the intersections between personal life, sense of self, common pathways, “general passions”, so as to foster individual and collective growth in terms of female strength and freedom?

An *empowerment* process is certainly not merely a step towards “modernity”: on the contrary, such a definition would be both tactically and

strategically hazardous. Instead, attempting to leave aside the stereotyped view of tradition and modernity as opposed terms – considering that in everyday life, there is constant contamination between the old and the new, continuity and change – makes it easier to understand the weight attributed, within an *empowerment* process, to openness to change, novelty and modernity. These are the prevailing trends in women's movements, and they have all emerged in the course of the positive actions and studies launched in the framework of cooperation projects in the Maghreb. In this sense, modernity means asserting the individuality of subjects, which for women means moving from a world of destiny to one of choice, both in the public and private spheres – though at a slower pace and with greater complexities in the latter. The propensity for modernity thus becomes a need and capacity for self-determination centred on ourselves; an expression of women's freedom that should be asserted worldwide -though acknowledging different pathways and contents. In this case, one could speak of “different differences”: a constellation within which differences of sex, gender, “culture”, generation and experiences can be contemplated in their often intermingled nature.

Altering the “logical framework”: from problems to dreams

We have focused at length on the potential leading thread characterising the creation of women's networks within cooperation projects. Now we must consider how to define objectives on a case by case basis, to support the implementation of political practices involving the greatest possible number of women. In this perspective, we would like to spend a word on “traditional” cooperation tools, and peculiarly on the logical framework: the planning tool used par excellence by governments, multilateral agencies and NGOs, that starts from the identification of a “key problem” on the field – and to which other relevant issues are attached in a relationship of cause and effect – to derive subsequently the “logical series” of objectives, results and activities constituting the basic structure of a project.

In this perspective, once again we want to stress what previously mentioned: namely, our refusal to adopt an approach based on the construction of women as victims or miserable – though without ever denying the sometimes dramatic problems experienced by women, and the hindrances preventing the assertion of their rights. Rather, the experiences we've made in these years – and whose results were quite considerable – started from the positive side: instead of focusing upon women as the “victims” of injustices, we considered their strengths and potentialities to transform, stressing not only their needs, but enhancing their dreams, desires, capacity to act and

change. Such an attitude and a methodology help adopting a wider perspective on reality and are rooted not only in the heritage of women's movements – and especially feminism, that opened space to the sphere of desire – but also in the organisational theories that have long confirmed the effectiveness of strategic planning based upon the “vision” of individuals and/or the group.

From details to generalities

Lastly, we wish to conclude by referring to two other issues we believe deserve reflection. First: who is to set-up the networks, with what representation capacity (real or alleged)? Second: how do women's networks fit within the more general context of development processes?

Who makes up the networks? Whom and what do they represent? Peculiarly when evading the traditional forms of electoral/representative democracy, the issue of *representation* is a consistently farther-reaching and deeper problem, that concerns first of all the history and lives of social movements. Starting from ourselves, the risk of creating mostly self-referential elites has become a tangible reality even in cooperation projects. This can affect not only principles of democratic agency, but also the coherence (or lack thereof) between objectives and the fulfilment of women's priorities, inasmuch as the theorizing of a few might be privileged over the needs and desires of a wider part of the female population. It also concerns the exclusion or marginalization of the *younger* generations, versus a “class” that has already been accredited by institutions and society both in its country of origin (be it on the northern or southern shores of the Mediterranean), and transnationally.

Another hazard that could seriously jeopardize networking capacities is the *friend/enemy* dynamic that too frequently is adopted by women's associations as much as by individual “militants”. The risk is to engender highly conflictive situations, causing a great loss of energy and making it difficult to create more extensive alliances – which is often an indispensable condition for the successful outcome of projects.

Yet if we want to stress positive and stimulating aspects, we must admit that women militant propose a particular blend of *individual and collective experience*, of personal life and life within an association (or a trade unions), of thoughts and emotions, general strategies and contingent actions.

Another noteworthy element is the greater ease that the presence of activists grants in terms of exchanges between *social and political-institutional*

interventions – even though it remains necessary to decide on a case by case basis which institutions must be involved, and how, without simply granting them authority to act on someone's behalf. Sometimes identified by means of creative methods, such processes enable the formation of new contents geared to promote agency to achieve the “common good”: a contribution towards changing, re-thinking and re-inventing a blend of politics and ethics, with the purpose of achieving citizenship.

Creating projects with women for women; yet, can women's networks remain *separate areas* or should they dialogue with and establish *relationships with men*, putting themselves at stake within society at large?

We would wish to give for granted the significance of a “female” political practice built in the course of a long feminist experience. Instead, we limit ourselves to stress that “specific” areas of expression and action are fundamental if women are to be allowed to assert their views. This is ever more important in contexts characterised by strong and deeply interiorised gender discrimination, in which the increase in women's awareness, self-esteem and autonomy requires an even longer and more complex process. It is thus vital for women to have spaces for interrelationship and self-organization in which they can mutually recognise themselves and each other as subjects. In this way, they can develop their agency so as to emerge and conquer bargaining power within the family and the society, in the economy and in politics, thus transforming relationships and roles.

On the other hand, working exclusively among women becomes a limit if it is not possible to make a further step, i.e. relating to and opening a debate with men. The risk, is to ensure relative wellbeing to a limited group of women only, rather than changing the position of women at home and in society at large.

In this perspective, we wish to recall the experience of *Réseau Med Espace Femmes*, namely the activities of the Constantine Women's Houses, in Tangiers, Tunis⁶⁷, which have been extended their to include citizenship rights. This has been achieved not least through the Prisme project, which focused on the economic *empowerment* of women as the complement and cornerstone of a strategy to support women's freedom of choice. Accordingly, these associations have been enabled to explore a new field, i.e. development, which does not traditionally belong to their range of initiatives. As such, the activities of the Houses have merged two fields of action that are usually artificially separated – i.e. rights and development –

⁶⁷ These centres foster citizenship for women and are managed by networks of local and national partners, set-up by women's (or sometimes mixed) associations, and by female trade unionists. In turn, these networks belong to *Réseau MedEspaceFemmes*.

thereby fostering the role of women as subjects who participate actively in every field.

The very fact that associations of women “activists” decide to enter the economic and “general” political field of their country – thereby acquiring further skills and establishing new collaboration and bargaining relationships with the main local development players – represents further potentials in terms of asserting the power of women. Benefits do not only lie in the positive merging of rights and development, but in the fact that their active involvement can “shorten” visibility and assertion processes that are usually very long – not least because their interlocutors are often gender-blind. Therefore, the challenge is to support these associations in becoming credible interlocutors at the local level, who can start negotiating rights and roles of women within the overall economic and political framework: moving from the specific to the general, also by confrontational means (and conflict), thus imposing a gender perspective able to contaminate development models, and possibly, in the long term, to introduce deep change in the political sphere.

Networking as a tool of women's empowerment in the Maghreb: Med Espace Femmes as an experience

Touria Tajeddine

In a millennium mainly characterized by real advances in equal opportunities for women, the challenge for the Mediterranean area is to count on all the human potential of the region, where the rate of inactive population is very high, with a low participation of women and young population which make it urgent to strengthen women active potentialities in order to guarantee their wellbeing.

In Morocco the situation of women has tremendously improved largely as a result of a long combat conducted by women activists in the 1980s thanks to their capacity to advocate, lobby and network and also thanks to a positive political conjuncture.

One example of networking was the constitution of a national committee composed of twenty-three organizations to support the One Million Of Signatures campaign to amend the Moroccan family code in 1987, which was initiated by the NGO Women Union Action. That action was a real success in the sense that the family code has been desecrated and for the first time dealt with as any other code.

In 1994, seven organizations launched a campaign focused on Urgent requests of Moroccan women, which resulted in amendments to commercial and civil law.

The Plan to Integrate Women in Development launched in 1999 was an occasion that mobilized all democratic forces in the country to support a plan judged by conservatives forces as "a Western menace to our identity".

Another example of networking in Morocco is the national committee of sixty-five organizations that was created to prepare in Rabat the Women World March Against Poverty. Ironically, the same day Islamists held a parallel march against the Plan to Integrate Women in Development – a plan

conceived to fight poverty.

Similarly, Algeria has had experiences of coordination in their combat to amend the family status in 1997, through the joint work of fourteen different organizations.

In Tunisia, despite the presence of repressive policies, NGOs have become a mobilizing force against all kind of violations.

I am giving these examples to show that networking has become a culture in the region and that women organizations are aware that “breaking barriers of isolation” empowers them. They also believe that multiplying their potentialities can be simultaneously a source of richness and power, and that the experience acquired in the field must be extended beyond their respective borders, insofar as women in the region share needs and expectations. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for coordination and partnerships between all those involved in the women empowerment issue: both NGOs and officials

Before talking about structured regional networks in the region, I'd like to mention that the women's rights movement has become one of the prime actors of democracy in the South. In fact, women's organizations concentrate their work on issues related to the reform of the family status, to women's economic and political empowerment, to the fight against all kind of violence – domestic as well as gender-based – and to the removal of the country's reservations to the CEDAW.

The focus on these issues has put women at the chore of the political transformation of the region. Consequently the approach to the issue of their rights has to change. Locally, women's rights must be mainstreamed into the official policies of the governments and not be isolated from other national issues. At the Euro-Mediterranean level, the north-south approach of cooperation must be replaced by Cross-national coordination.

In the south Mediterranean area, women's organizations are more and more developing well structured links among themselves. Many NGOs of the region are members of The Arab Women Court formed in 1996 in Lebanon, which is involved in fighting against gender violence and advocating equality between sexes, for example in terms of the right to ask for divorce. They are also members of the Maghreb-Mashrek Network for Information and Training on Gender, and the Aicha Network created in 1993, and constituted of associations from Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon which are committed to fighting discriminatory practices towards women. In addition to these examples, the Collectif 95 Maghreb Egalité is another experience of coordination among women's

organizations of the Maghreb.

These are some experiences of regional networks in the south Mediterranean area. Another example is that of Med Espace Femmes, which includes networks, women's organizations and unions from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Italy. The specificity of this network – operational since 2001 – is its concrete implementation of the regional project “Action Positive Pour La Citoyenneté et l'Egalité De Chances Des Femmes Au Maghreb”, coordinated by IMED and financed by the European Commission in the framework of the Meda Democracy Program. As the project encouraged national and cross-national networking, the outcome has been the opening of three women spaces: La Maison De La Femme in Tangiers, Morocco; Espace Attanassuf in Tunis the capital, and Maison Nedjma in Constantine, Algeria. These three spaces are managed by national networks that include women's associations and unions.

Through a series of cross national activities and productions, the project helped significantly the components of the cross-national network in empowering mutually their capacities, not least through the exchange of good practices. Members of the network managed to meet very often. For example, two seminars have been realized, one in Tunisia and the second in Tangiers, Morocco. Furthermore, three training sessions have been organized. The first one, held in Tangiers in July 2002, was about Rights and Gender Difference. The second; was a sort of visit-study to Italy destined to twenty-four young activists members of different associations, that focused on Good Practices in Communication and Management, and was held in Rome in October 2002 and again in February 2003. This very group benefited as well of the last session of training that was held in Tunisia in April 2003, and dealt with Identity and Citizenship of young Women from Maghreb.

Some pedagogical tools were also produced in the framework of the project⁶⁸:

- a training guidebook: a tangible result of a long common work which lasted ten years and that involved women from both shores of the Mediterranean. The guide, available both in French and in Arabic, offers ideas that could be proposed as formations for young women;
- a guidebook of good practices, available in Arabic and French, which includes the results of a survey conducted among NGOs from Algeria, Tunisia, Italy and Morocco;

⁶⁸ To consult them, please visit the network's website: www.medespacefemmes.net

Women's networking across borders

- cross-national newsletters of the Med Espace Femmes, to give visibility to actions realized by the partners of the project “Action Positives Pour les Droits de Citoyenneté des Femmes et l’Egalité de Chances au Maghreb;
- a radio program launched by our partners in Algeria;
- a play, “Lalla Jmila”, produced by Moroccan participants;
- a video film produced by our Tunisian partners;
- a cross national website: www.medespacefemmes.net

Before ending my presentation I'd like to point out the importance of networking as a strategy to preserve women's democratic achievements in a region where all kind of conservative forces are gaining field, and to coordinate their actions to become prime actors in the democratic process of their respective countries.

Women's networking in the fight against violence

Maha Abu-Dayyeh

Feminism and evolving challenges

Historically, in all societies, women have had to negotiate and struggle for their space and rights within patriarchal systems that place them on the lower end of social, economic and political power scale. These inequalities are made manifest in the private sphere within the home and in the public sphere within the nation. Feminists were the first to analyze power sources and abuse of power, from women's perspectives. Feminists in both the North and the South have contributed substantially to power analyses from their respective standpoints. Feminists in the South have contributed substantially to identifying and understanding the new forms of colonialism and their gender dimensions that are enforced in a large way by the global financial institutions and the military industries. Feminists in the North, particularly those from communities on the social and economic periphery, have forcefully argued the specific forms of discrimination and oppression due to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disabilities, and so on.

Both Southern and Northern feminists have analysed how systems and institutions within their respective locations are at the root of the double (or more) marginalization of women within the groups and communities: politically, because of the communities they belong to, and socially, because of their gender. Experiences and insights of both groups of feminist, when shared and exchanged in settings conducive to mutual learning, have contributed to a fuller, more comprehensive theorizing about power, inequality, and exclusion.

Although feminists share some of these common legacies, forces operating at the supra-structural level also divide them. In the age of globalization and the unilateral power of the United States supported by the Congressional-military-industrial complex, the major European nations, and the various international monetary institutions and transnational corporations; the

financial resources are being steadily and surely siphoned from social services and social development towards militarization and local and international policing. Also, the economic gap – thus the economic opportunities – between the global North and the South continues to widen, profoundly shaping the nature of human migration. The educated elite (and local capital), alongside the exploited, feminized migrant labour force (though more heavily regulated and controlled) flows South to North. This North/South divide further reinforces the marginalization and victimization of Southern women. The North/South structural inequalities here briefly described, similarly shape relations between feminists from the South and the North.

Feminist transnational networking: values, leadership, and problem-solving in the context of unequal power relations

Transnational networking and exchange of insights, experiences, and resources have become one of the main sources of feminist empowerment to combat discrimination, abuse, and violence against women. It is a strategy that more and more individual feminists and feminist organizations are undertaking. Complementarily, compatible visions and goals of justice are essential for effective networking alongside fundamental feminist values of mutuality and respect.

However, despite individual good intentions, there are too numerous examples of undervaluing, undermining, betrayal of Southern feminists by their feminist sisters from the North in the course of doing joint work and activities, even when the latter are ostensibly working on behalf of Southern women. Generations of power socialization of Northern women in relation to the “Other,” combined with the current global structural inequalities, create feminism – “imperial feminism”⁶⁹ – fraught with serious contradictions and sometimes hypocrisy among those who claim to be allies to Southern women.

To face and resolve these contradictions and eliminate altogether the hypocrisy within the transnational feminist movement, principles of mutuality, reciprocity, respect, and genuine empowerment and self-determination must be the guiding operational principles, especially for resolving conflicts. We must create spaces for the kinds of exchanges and problem-solving which themselves generate deeper knowledge and understanding, and promote intellectual and emotional growth among all

⁶⁹ Amos, V. and Parmar, P. (2005) “Challenging Imperial Feminism”, *Feminist Review*, 80 (1): 44-63.

participants. This leads to mutual empowerment – the essence of feminist activism. Any deviation from these principles will only serve to invite taken-for-granted ways of patriarchal power – power to humiliate, to silence, and ultimately to dominate – to flourish in our midst. This kind of relations will be yet another, albeit if women-centred, form of the new colonialism, which, needless to say, will undermine feminist work and the specific organizations established under the banner of empowering disempowered women.

Whose benefiting?

When North/South networking between feminist organization is disempowering to the organizations in the South, the connection with Northern feminist becomes a liability. Moreover, because of the association with Western feminists, whose countries contributed (or are continuing to contribute) to the colonialist hegemony, feminist organizations in the South face a real dilemma within their own settings. On the one hand, networking with feminist organizations in the North is essential for confronting the increasingly globalized systems of discrimination and isolation of communities and of women in those communities. On the other hand, in so doing they run the risk of alienation and/or marginalisation within their own communities, that would undermine their own effectiveness.

What about the future generations of feminists?

Young women are the future of the feminist movement. In growingly more complex global and local dynamics that impact directly and indirectly upon gender relations, potential leaders among the current cohort of young women need to be guided and protected from having only to focus on their own survival and prevented from becoming cynical. If young women only experience women's exchanges at the international level as instrumental and only to promote participants' own personal and institutional agendas, a whole generation of potential women leaders, both in the South and North, would ultimately become alienated. This would in essence be a further gain for the reactionary and patriarchal forces at the local as well as the global levels.

Equally important, older generations of feminists have much to learn from and understand about the realities facing younger women. We must create spaces, in all our gatherings, for intergenerational dialogues, where to listen to our younger sisters and seek their advice and counsel. This is a radical departure from the traditional (and patriarchal) hierarchal relations within settings where even only women preside.

Women's networking between Italy and the Middle East

In the context of the increased militarization of the Middle Eastern region, the hegemony of capitalist institutions, the presence of corrupt and unaccountable governments, and growth of religious fundamentalisms, the Middle Eastern women's movement is facing a multitude of serious challenges. The very communities that sustain them – their own – are at risk of facing US military aggression as well as internal armed conflicts. Thus, their communities' struggle for survival often results in shifting priorities and focus, that will mean move away from women's needs and rights. The erosion, and sometimes the complete demise, of governmental responsibility for the social and economic development of their communities, instigates the growth of an increasingly fundamentalist Islamic movement, and women and men who otherwise would not, support it. In that context, the Arab women's movement has strategically to balance between fighting their government for social and political justice – forming their networks accordingly – and avoiding being co-opted by the religious movement, with its very clear social agenda that undermines the status and rights of women.

The women's movement in the Middle East needs the support of their counterparts in Italy and other European countries. This support should be provided with full respect and understanding of the local context and without conditionality nor instrumentality. There should be clear understanding that local women are taking the lead in the local scene. Simultaneously, the relationship *must be*, so it will be recognised by all *to be*, mutually beneficial. This is so because at the very least, the relationship will help Italian women's organizations better understand the context from where many of their new immigrant communities are coming from. An open exchange and connection will promote a healthy atmosphere for further theorizing about all sorts of power imbalance at the local as well at the global levels in order to develop better strategies to combat all forms of violence against women. In addition to mutual learning, successful exchanges and networking will encourage other institutions to join the process, further fortifying the regional networks, that would then be more effective in combating the growing reactionary forces in the Mediterranean region. Conversely, failure in relations will result in negative reactions amongst women's groups that will affect the willingness of others to cooperate and join forces; alienate the younger women from joining the women's movement; and discourage women groups from both the North and South, but especially from the latter, from future cooperation.

Part Three

The politics of migrant women's transnational
networking: between philanthropy and
development cooperation

Diaspora philanthropy in Italy

Charito Basa

Introduction

This research report on diaspora philanthropy (DP) in Italy reveals that female migrants and exiles⁷⁰ have been *giving back*, contributing to their home countries through productive investments as associations and as groups and offering individual development assistance among family members, for many years now. In contrast to priorities for remittances, which correspond to the family's needs for food, clothing, housing, education and health, this study focuses on broader development support to the countries of origin for the women interviewed.

I used my personal network of migrant women's associations in order to locate women involved in diaspora philanthropy in Italy. Preliminary contacts were made through phone interviews, followed by face-to-face interviews. Italian development cooperation NGOs in Rome, including the office of the National Associations of Local Governments, were also contacted to find out whether the decentralized international cooperation programmes were involving migrant women or migrant associations as promoters and partners in development projects in poor countries.

No information of any kind related to diaspora philanthropy was found in Italy. Web searches pointed mainly to informational projects related either to the socio-political and economic conditions of migrants or to activities and records related to the social and political facets of migration in Italy. This research proved to be the first ever attempt to find migrant women in Italy who are involved in transnational cooperation, and as such, the research has received great interest from the migrant women's organizations contacted. As I am a migrant woman from the Philippines and also involved in development and organizing work of migrant women at the local and national levels, I knew many of the women before this study. I chose to

⁷⁰ As many were not officially recognized as refugees, the term exile was used by two respondents when describing their situation and will therefore be used throughout this report.

interview the women in a very conversational manner. During the interviews, I emphasized the role of women like “us” and the lack of recognition of “our” contribution. Questions were formulated in such a way that the discussions promoted awareness of the concept of *giving back*. In many cases, the discussions became organizational work for finding new strategies or to strengthen existing efforts.

The main promoters of DP represented in this report include twenty-one women leaders in migrant communities and founders of women's associations in Rome, Milan, Venice and Turin. They are migrant workers, ex-students and former exiles and entrepreneurs who have settled in the country. The majority of the contributions sent from Italy are used to support the poor populations in their communities of origin and target the weakest members of their societies.

This paper presents a profile of these migrant women's transnational philanthropic activities. It discusses the types of projects the women undertake, their motivations, the different ways they work, and the obstacles faced. The report ends with an overview of the impacts of their actions and future goals for their philanthropic work.

The diaspora philanthropy of migrant women in Italy

Migrant women leaders in this study have multiple roles and make a wide range of contributions. They not only provide professional and voluntary support services to their migrant communities outside of their usual paid work, but are also actively performing diaspora philanthropy activities in their countries of origin, both as individuals and by starting or participating in various organizations.

The research reveals a great array of contributions by migrant and exile women in Italy. They have funded several activities for poor women and other marginalized groups in their countries of origin: scholarships for poor students, supplying educational materials, reconstruction of schools, construction of factories and medical laboratories, reconstruction of houses of marginalized families, and establishment of training and social centres for empowerment and livelihoods support programmes.

All in all, there were twenty-one women interviewed: six of them originated from Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cape Verde and Senegal); eight of them are from Latin America (Peru, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Brazil); five from Asia (Philippines and Sri Lanka); one from Albania and one from Ukraine. Thirteen of these have contributed much to this research not only

because of their availability for interviews, but also because their activities have focused on *giving back* to their migrant communities in Italy and in their countries of origin for many years now.

The African diaspora organizations involve second-generation migrants. They have been leaders of community actions and have expanded to join other migrant women's groups in Milan and in Rome.

The leaders of the Union of Eritrean Women and Tigray Women's Associations (TWA), Ainom Maricos and Tzhainesc Casai, became involved through their mothers, and their groups have continued to support the empowerment of women in their countries by raising awareness and by sending concrete development support as presented below.

The Somali Women in Rome, led by Osman Lul Mohamed, also conducts the same activities, while Faduma Dirie of "Associazione Spazio Solidale" (*Association Solidarity Space*) leads women in Milan from Somalia as well as other countries of origin by providing literacy and language lessons for children and adults. Through her association's support, she has been able to undertake DP activities in Somalia and Mali.

These four women are active professional intercultural mediators, while Ainom and Osman Lul engage in entrepreneurial activities as well. Ainom created the "Cooperativa Tropico" (*Tropic Cooperative*), employing migrants that provide cleaning, maintenance and care-giving services in Milan, while Osman Lul has her own store selling African products in Rome.

Maria de Lourdes Jesus, a journalist by profession, migrated to Italy when she was fifteen years old to work as a domestic helper. She then founded the Organization of Cape Verdean Women in Italy in the mid-1980s. In 2004, she shifted from organizing women's activities to establishing a development NGO that now provides support to the poor population in Cape Verde.

Lucy Rojas, an exile from Chile, had always maintained active work on social issues. In 1991 she founded Cooperativa Proficua in Milan, along with other migrant women. Cooperativa Proficua provides professional services to help professional migrants in Milan receive recognition for their educational titles and offers support for other legal issues, such as compilation of income tax returns, requests for citizenship, translation services, and intercultural education for students. The cooperative also provides refresher courses for migrant doctors, nurses, teachers and lawyers who want to work and exercise their professions in Italy. She later founded the ALPI/ANDES "Comitato Pro Gemellaggio Milano/Val Paraíso"

(*Committee in favour of the twinning Milan/Val Paraiso*) which conducts twinning and educational exchange activities between Milan and Val Paraiso in Chile.

Alica Patora, a physical therapist by profession and an exile from Argentina, is a member of Candelaria, a mixed migrant women's association that provides legal and intercultural mediation services, leadership and computer literacy training for migrant women workers in Rome. Although she operates her DP activities solely, Alicia has had collaborated with others as a volunteer providing support services and in sharing experiences with other women at the Italian Refugee Centre in Rome. Zuleima Margarita Mira from El Salvador came to Rome to work as a domestic helper. Later, her employing family had hired her to work in their lamp factory. She founded the "Associazione Senores Salvadorenas y Italianas" (ASSI, *Association of Salvadorans and Italian women*), which was initiated upon request of the El Salvadorian Embassy in Rome, in their search for development support for disaster-inflicted areas in El Salvador.

Likewise, Nelly de Lima, a Communications university graduate in Peru, had the same initial work experience, working as a domestic helper in Italy. She ventured to learn more. By participating in training activities, she was able to become a professional intercultural mediator and now works with an organization named "Punto Rosso" (*Red Point*) which provides legal and counselling services in Milan. She initiated her DP activities alone, first establishing a library in her native mountain region of Apurimac. With the support of her son, she is currently providing scholarships and school materials for the poor children of emigrants from the Andes now living in Lima.

Minda Teves, a native of Surigao del Sur, Mindanao, The Philippines, is the leader of the biggest Filipino community in Turin. Joined by 43 of her family members (42 female and 1 male), whom she all assisted in coming to Italy to work as domestic helpers, "Associazione Culturale Filippini del Piemonte" (*Philippine's Cultural Association of Piemonte*) provides family counselling services and actively contributes to cultural activities organized by local governments. She is a key contact both for the community and Italian institutions and has become a member of the Piemonte Regional Consultancy Committee in the area of migration and culturally related discourse. She leads her group in the DP activities by sending material and monetary support in her community of origin in Mindanao.

Dava Gjoka from Albania migrated to Italy to pursue her studies, and she later founded and currently chairs the Albanese Cultural Association "Skanderbeg". This organization is composed of Albanian migrants and

promotes socio-cultural links between Italy and Albania. Furthermore, Dava joined a group of intercultural mediators and also works with some of the women interviewed in this study. She works independently to find a supportive partner for her development educational programme for women in Albania that she now coordinates.

What are the women's motivations?

The principles of cooperation and solidarity interact as the women actively seek to respond to a combination of social, economic, political and cultural problems in their countries of origin. Women in DP may have limited resources, but the little they can contribute, as argued by all of them, makes a lot of difference to their own lives and to the lives of those who live in poverty.

Lives of these migrant women are touched by the harsh reality witnessed during their infrequent visits to their countries of origin. Maria de Lourdes of Tabanka Onlus said that Cape Verde has few resources and poverty is everywhere on the islands. Zuleima of ASSI explained that when she visited her hometown in El Salvador after the earthquake, the children had not been able to attend school for many months already. Furthermore, despite investments made by the Italian government, other countries and organizations, development support still does not reach many poor areas, such as in the Albanian Province of Mirdita, from where Dava Gjoka originates. She further confesses that the socio-economic condition of the country continues to deteriorate. Very few social services are currently available for women in the country, as compared to during the communist regime. As a consequence, emigration has become the goal for many Albanians.

“Empowerment” for women was clearly associated with gender roles and challenging gender disparities in rights. “Fighting patriarchy² was a common motivation and response from four women interviewed and involved in women’s economic empowerment and awareness-raising projects.

Ashoka Ponnemperuna of “Non Solo Donne” (*Not Only Women*) said that women in Sri Lanka have very limited rights and are mostly dependent on their “macho” and oftentimes violent husbands. Tzhainesc Casai, Ainom Maricos, Faduma Dirie and Dava Gjoka, who all explained that they come from patriarchal societies of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Albania, further express that women need to be empowered, to «build on their capabilities», to «help them become aware of their rights» and «become independent».

Empowerment may also be achieved through political action. Political activism has been important for Lucy Rojas from Chile, Alicia Patora from Argentina, and Osman Lul and Faduma Dirie from Somalia. Their experiences of collective political action and social organizing in their countries of origin are extended in Italy. Alicia affirms that their search for justice and legal protection for the victims of human rights violations in Argentina remains an important concern, even after moving to Italy.

Another striking motivation and type of empowerment was related to the sense of community. This topic emerged in the interview with Maria de Lourdes Jesus of Tabanka Onlus, who was concerned with the negative perception on migrants: «It is necessary to get away from the stereotyped image of migrants. We are seen as poor and only dependent on services of the host countries. We also need to raise the level of our own consciousness, especially those of the second and third generations by way of promoting socio-cultural exchanges between the countries of origin and where we live now.»

As these examples show, migrant women choose to actively *give back* to their countries of origin and communities, not only in the form of provisions but also in a way that challenges existing inequalities and disparities and leads to longer term impact.

What are their transnational projects?

The transnational projects undertaken are diverse, both in the issues addressed and in contributions. As the following section shows, female immigrants in Italy have long been contributing to a wide range of diaspora philanthropy activities, with some initiatives beginning several decades ago. Their initiatives are related to youth and education, construction, healthcare, and training and economic development, each of which is discussed in more detail below.

Supporting education, combating illiteracy and preventing juvenile delinquency

Educational initiatives were priority projects for the DP women in Italy, as revealed by the number of transnational projects found in this research. All of the women interviewed maintained that if no investment is made on the education of children coming from extremely poor families, the impact would weigh heavily both on the family and on the society. Children's rights to basic education, food, clothing and shelter are basic needs that require substantial attention and resources. Of the twelve projects discussed by the

women, seven are operative and five have been completed.

Supporting post-conflict/disaster rehabilitation and construction of infrastructure

The second most common focus of attention of transnational development programmes that emerged from this research was projects for reconstruction, repair and maintenance of damaged structures. The common objectives were to provide structures and support to the local population most affected by conflicts and to contribute to the rehabilitation of areas devastated by natural calamities, such as ASSI's initial project in El Salvador. The women interviewed have witnessed that a lack of structures and adequate spaces for training thwart development and prevent community organizing.

Supporting specific health needs of poor women and children

Several diaspora philanthropy projects in the past, focused on health issues of women and children in marginalized communities in Africa. Some activities are based on general health concerns, such as work towards prevention of the spread of diseases and awareness-raising for women on health issues, as mentioned by Ainom Maricos of the Eritrean Women's Union. Other initiatives are based on more specific issues, related to views of gender empowerment as well as health, such as those linked to reproductive health in general or female genital mutilation specifically. Two of the structures established in Eritrea respond to specific healthcare needs of women during the war.

Skills training projects for women's economic empowerment

Giving women the voice and the opportunity to discuss and improve their situation is important to the development of the country. The active participation of women for the social and economic wellbeing of communities is a reflection of development.

Faduma M. Dirie and the Somali Women's Association in Rome separately support skills training programmes for economic empowerment of women in Somalia. In 2003 the association of migrant women from Sri Lanka, "Non Solo Donne" in Rome, provided financial support to buy sewing machines for a women's centre in their home country. Tabanka Onlus funded the purchase of sewing machines and supports the training activities for women at the community institution they established on Island of Principe in 2005. The Women's House in Mirdita, Albania, also will provide vocational training courses for women. «We have to teach them how to fish and not give them fish all the time», explained Osman Lul Mohamed, who also sends extra funds from her own pocket to contribute to the efforts of Hinna

Women's Association's skills training projects in Mogadishu.

Boxes of food and material aid

Providing food and material aid are some of the most common forms of gift-giving activities by women. Minda Teves' family sends 21 big boxes of material and food supplies to poor areas in Southern Mindanao each year. Nelly de Lima spends about 1.200 Euro yearly for the material goods (mostly school supplies and second-hand warm clothing) she sends to Lima for the children of poor emigrants from the Andes. The Senegalese women in Rome also send material goods such as clothing and medicines to their hometowns on an occasional basis. Other than those doing actual DP activities, such as the Tigray Women's Association, the Eritrean Women's Union mostly sends material and food aid for distribution to their countries of origin (Ukraine, Nicaragua, Philippines, Brazil) in times of emergency.

Other projects and partnerships

Some very unusual but relatively important projects have been initiated and continue to be supported by women in exile from Chile and Argentina. For Alicia Patora, it is important to preserve the political and historical memories of mass disappearances and violations of human rights. Both of them, who have been living in Italy since the time of their exile and who have very little support from their own communities, affirmed that their experiences with political activism in their earlier years have helped them to continue to serve their countries.

Lucy Rojas' dream began when she first brought a group of Italian professionals for tourism purposes to Val Paraiso, Chile in 1997. Her NGO has established twinning projects among three secondary schools in Val Paraiso and in Milan that enhance professional teachers' and health operators' work in adapting curricula to provide specific approaches for tackling problems of the high school students on the verge of social exclusion.

Another interesting project being supported since 2004 by 56 members of the Eritrean Women's Union, is the distance adoption of elderly orphaned women, which supports women whose family were killed during the war with Ethiopia.

How they do it

Resources and Partnerships

The availability of time, space and sufficient human resources are fundamental to the success of any project.

Almost all the women interviewed are doing their DP work on a voluntary basis and many of their efforts are largely dependent on individual resources. The prevalent strategy used by women involves establishing partnerships, whether in Italy or in the project countries, and include family members, human rights movements, and local and national NGOs. Many partnerships are formed within their own community, along with some Italian solidarity groups and individuals. Funding agencies that financially contribute to the transnational projects are also considered as partners in this report. The remainder of this section will further elaborate on the various resources and partnerships available for the organizations and philanthropic activities discussed in this report.

Awareness Events and Fundraising Activities

The most popular strategy used by many women interviewed to find potential partners involves organizing awareness-raising seminars and promotion of other cultural programmes between migrant and Italian communities.

ASSI and Tabanka sponsor several events for fundraising. ASSI and Tabanka receive performances, free-of-charge, from some artists and bands as contributions for fundraising activities. Common promotional strategies for the events include flyers, posters and migrant community radio programmes. Many women also organize social events for fundraising purposes such as handicraft sales, social dinners, theatre presentations and concerts. Holiday events, such as Independence Day celebrations, also contribute to the efforts of ASSI.

Impact of the efforts of migrant women in diaspora philanthropy

The impacts of the diaspora philanthropy were felt to encompass both individual emotive rewards as well as physical developments in the project countries. Although some of the impact can best be perceived as “expected impact”, others have seen concrete examples of development and social change.

Increased empowerment and self-esteem

All of the women interviewed said that having led campaigns to support development projects in the countries of origin involve practical skills acquired through the organizing work. According to Zuleima of ASSI, «We need to know more from each other, from those success stories – but this is already a good start». For Dava Gjoka, becoming the project Coordinator of

the activity in Albania was very fulfilling and has increased her self-esteem.

Recognition and respect

The recognition, enthusiasm and respect of the beneficiaries, the community and local governments, and seeing the positive results of big and small projects implemented, infuse encouragement and inspiration to several women to continue their transnational philanthropic activities.

Dava, Ainom, and Tzhainesc expressed such feelings.

The Somali community in Rome appreciates the efforts of the Hinna Women's Association's, so Osman Lul continues to receive support for the activities of the association. For Zuleima of ASSI, it was very gratifying to see that local newspapers in her country of origin have recognized the organization's effort. The group received awards of recognition from institutions that they supported; and letters of appreciation she received from some Salvadorian immigrants in the United States likewise moved her.

Reconnection and increase of social consciousness

Several women confessed that they were touched by what is seen when they go back home, and there is a strong feeling of being reconnected with their country of origin and a sense of social consciousness. Tabanka Onlus promotes social consciousness of the socioeconomic condition of the country of origin. Their strategy of involving young volunteers back home in their DP activities has enhanced the rediscovery of cultural identity and has attracted enormous interest from the second and third generations to help development in Cape Verde.

Social impact in communities of intervention

The women interviewed visit their hometowns whenever possible; however, much feedback can only be received through family members and project partners who send reports and photographs of the projects. Based on the observations of the women interviewed, there were evidences of the benefits of investments they have sent to their communities of origin.

Awareness-raising activities for health and the well-being of women have been the primary focus of projects in Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Despite the continuing decline of the socio-economic and political condition in these countries and the scarcity of international aid, the women interviewed said there have been changes in the attitudes and social consciousness of women in the communities. As a result, certain cultural traditions that push women more into the margins, such as seen with the issue of female genital mutilation, are being combated.

Although assistance is received from the diaspora at the global level, the support coming from Italy has also contributed to change in Eritrea and in the Tigray Province of Ethiopia. For their contribution, TWA in the diaspora worldwide won an award from the African Women Educationalists Association, because their projects influenced societal attitudes toward harmful traditional practices and early marriage in their areas by raising awareness of the problems and consequences.

The skills training provided to women in Somalia, Eritrea, Tigray Province and in Sri Lanka have taught women to become economically active. According to Faduma Dirie and Osman Lul, the women they have helped are now contributing economically to sustain family needs through small-scale businesses. The women beneficiaries to dressmaking skills projects in Island of Principe and in Sri Lanka have become economically productive, rather than fully relying on their husbands' insufficient income for their families and are now able to help support the primary education of their children.

Community empowerment

In the mountain village of Apurimac in Peru, the local people are using the centre as a meeting and study place for their empowerment and to sustain their social consciousness around issues affecting them. In Albania, Dava's project in Mirdita has brought about unity and community empowerment as evidenced by the active participation of the community and women's groups in the region. Based on the interviews with women involved in DP, projects introduced in Chile, Argentina, Somalia, Cape Verde and Island of Principe are other examples where community empowerment were evident based on the women's interaction with their communities of origin.

Education of children and women

For the majority of the projects supported by the migrant women and their associations in Italy, some changes are already visible even though their physical and monetary contributions are limited. Children are motivated to study hard, pursue further education, and achieve good grades through the twinning projects in Chile, as declared by Lucy Rojas and as evidenced by an increase of requests for similar projects by other schools. She observed that the approaches in their programmes are viewed positively and that other institutions also want to apply similar methods. In El Salvador, creativity was encouraged when a literary writing contest for school children was launched by ASSI. The projects supported in Somalia and Rwanda have contributed to the fight against illiteracy even if on a small-scale. In Cape Verde and Brazil, street children are provided shelter and education, instead of living in streets where they have little protection and are at risk of social

exclusion and juvenile delinquency. All of these projects have also further empowered teachers in recipient communities by providing extra time and dedication for teaching and guidance.

Improved infrastructure

The construction of factories in Eritrea have created thousands of jobs for unemployed women and men and provided the local population with cheaper materials and medicines. The establishment of centres in Albania, Island of Principe and Argentina provide free health services and skills training activities for women and men. The rehabilitation and improvement of facilities of the elementary schools has kept the children in schools. The reconstruction of ten housing units in Praia, Cape Verde now provides a very decent living environment for extremely poor families.

Advocating human rights

Other benefits include promoting an active awareness of human rights violations. The creation of the Archive has aroused interest in conflicts and history among the younger generation and has led them to be active in the search for justice for the victims of the earlier generation. Today there are many professional volunteers, such as psychologists and lawyers, who are contributing to different activities of the project, the majority of whom are remaining family members and supporters of the quest for justice of the human rights victims during the dictatorship regime in Argentina.

Obstacles

Voluntary work in the DP faces several pressures due to the economic and legal circumstances of the women and members of their communities. In general, a major barrier is the absence of resources (i.e., lack of space, time, money and adequate and capable human resources.), which has unfortunately also caused the weakening of several migrant women's organizations. It has also thwarted interest from many community members to join such groups, as explained by many of the women interviewed.

The majority need regular paid work to maintain residency rights in Italy and meet their economic needs. Overall, lack of economic resources is seen as one of the major roadblocks preventing migrant organizations from implementing further work.

For many of these women, Dava, Zuleima, Minda, Tzhainesc, Ashoka, Nelly and Cristina, their own homes have become their working place, where most of the work is done during their time off from other employment and through

using their own resources. Other than huge telephone and communication expenditures, most have invested their own money to buy computers and other office equipment to sustain their organizing work. The women interviewed complained of having been in a very «stressful» situation, admitted that they are «exploiting themselves» and are «sacrificing their private lives».

Cultural issues are also felt to influence a “lack of consciousness and interest” from migrants to join and participate actively in organizing work. Among the interviewees, Ashoka mentioned that it has something to do with the patriarchal mentality «imported» to Italy by her male counterparts. In her country, women are powerless and therefore are not allowed by their husbands to join organizations. As a sad consequence, she is hardly able to recruit other women from her community in Rome to support her endeavours.

Another perceived barrier is the lack of participation and interest among the second/third generation of immigrants, which seems to point to weaker ties with the country of origin among those who were born and raised in Italy. Although two women leaders interviewed in this research come from second generation of the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities, the majority of the migrant organizations are still led by the first generation of migrants in many communities in Italy. Ainom and Tzhainesc have tried to influence the younger generations’ involvement but have faced great difficulties. Maria de Lourdes of Tabanka Onlus also mentioned the same problem, so her association has started to involve the youth directly in awareness-raising projects in Italy. Unfortunately, there is little investment either from the Italian government or from the migrant communities for cultural education of the young migrants who are mostly absorbing the Italian culture taught in schools.

Another major constraint expressed by the majority of the interviewees is the shortage of skills for project proposal writing, management and evaluation of projects. Due to the lack of resources, they are not able to properly monitor the activities they support. According to Ainom Maricos of the Eritrean Women’s Union, these shortages result in many errors in monitoring and evaluating projects.

The lack of information and almost exclusion of migrant organizations in participating in “calls for proposals” are other barriers in building the capacity of migrant organizations.

All the women interviewed claimed that the Italian development cooperation working in many poor countries are employing only Italian development “experts” and not considering the expertise or promoting the participation of

migrants from the global South to work in their own countries of origin. As it appears today, supporting diaspora philanthropy projects is not part of the national government's development policy.

In several instances, partnerships with governments of origin were perceived as problematic. ASSI does not want to work with their local government anymore because promises were not fulfilled, at times not delivered at all; the Eritrean Women's Union said it is even more difficult to evaluate and monitor the work implemented with government counterparts because of lack of transparency. These difficulties may represent an uneven balance of power or may simply reflect the inexperience of partnering between governments and diaspora based organizations.

Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that migrant women work to contribute to the development of their countries of origin through their remittances, and to host countries through their labour and skills. Yet very little is known about their role and contribution in the context of development and the social impact it brings to societies of origin.

It is important first to highlight the already outstanding contribution of migrant women's organizations and the women migrants interviewed in this research and the invaluable support they provide to their migrant communities' struggle for equality and human rights (with particular attention to women's rights). Moreover, many of the women interviewed or encountered during this study have also been leading agents in promoting and bringing development in their countries of origin for many years.

This research has affirmed that the influential factors of *giving back* are part of "a woman's instinct" – their moral obligation to respond to poverty as a consequence of war, civil unrest and natural disasters in their countries of origin, had become their passion.

From the information gathered, activities that support education of poor children hold primary importance, because lack of investment in education leads to further marginalization. For many it is a fundamental right that cannot be denied to poor children nor to women in poverty-stricken countries where the women interviewed originate.

Evidently women are seriously affected by poverty in any given situation. Whether collectively or individually, many of the projects sustained focused on the empowerment of women because women have little or no access to resources and therefore need support. This is particularly true to the

activities of women from the African diaspora, where greater sensitivity to women's needs could be seen in many of the DP projects identified in this report.

Women exiles (and refugees) also play a critical role in building peace and restoring social and economic order following the end of hostilities. The opportunity to rebuild anew on equality and respect for human rights have also been found in the activities supported by the Somali, Eritrean, Tigray and Argentinean women interviewed.

Although the women reach out to their own communities and Italian development institutions for support, very little success has been obtained, as could be seen in the quantity and the amount of contributions sent to areas of intervention. Other than the experiences of Dava Gjoka and Maria de Lourdes Jesus, who have received support from NGOs and other institutions, the majority of women interviewed carry out activities mainly on their own, with minimal help from their communities, a few Italian friends and solidarity groups.

Local governments provide little support for projects initiated by migrants. At the national level, development funds are not available and projects funded by the European Commission are not accessible to migrant organizations. Whereas Italian NGOs also struggle in their survival due to the scarcity of funds, diaspora philanthropy activities have not had the space to compete at all.

All the interviewees expressed concerns related to structural problems and lack of technical know-how in project organizing and management. In almost all cases, women migrants work on a voluntary basis in their own homes during their days off, and therefore had very limited time to concentrate on their initiatives. As a result, the increased stress has major effects on the outcomes of their activities.

Volunteer work is not sustainable and repeated experiences of a decrease in the number of memberships have been apparent. Understandably, with the increase in migrants' legal and financial insecurity in regular paid work for their own subsistence and that of their families hindered participation to migrant community organizations.

How much this affects the building up of successive leaders is another issue faced by these women.

Partnership is another crucial concern of the women interviewed. Many women relied on family members, the simplest source of information to understand the impact and the realization of projects. This research showed that government institutions in countries of origin were not ideal partners

and that good practices of networking and partnership maintained with women's movements and NGOs in many experiences have proved to be functional.

The lack of trust and interest shown by migrant women to pursue and explore partnership with Italian development institutions seemed to be by force, not by choice, because access to development support is almost exclusively reserved for Italian NGOs.

In this research, the overriding message conveyed by all the women interviewed is the call for capacity building for empowerment to enhance community organizing and as productive development bridges between home and host countries. Nevertheless, this research initiative has become an inspiration to the women interviewed and to many other female migrants and leaders who have expressed their interest in *giving back* to their countries as well.

Between “here” and “there”: migrant women’s involvement in development cooperation

Josette Martial

It’s a real pleasure to be here in this assembly with you all in the “Casa Internazionale delle Donne” (*International Women’s House* of Rome). A place for foreigners and natives, that represents an important story in the process of social contemporary progress.

I am here to represent Maria de Lourdes Jesus, president of Tabanka onlus association, and the newborn Nyeleti onlus of which I am president. Two associations of migrants that want to assume an active role in cooperation and create a strong dialogue and a constructive communication between the African and Italian communities.

To play a part in the realisation of this women’s network is for us a natural and important step. The word woman, in this case, has a profound significance tied to the principle of feminine: that of the woman’s vital capacity and of her role, that is growing more and more everyday and everywhere.

Cooperation is a gesture of justice and today it is very significant, because it gives us an opportunity to give back what has been taken away from these countries. This is fundamental and it justifies our philosophy and our actions. If we are to have any faculty to act, we must have access to financial resources. This point is very important as it enables us to act constructively and live with serenity. We insist on this not for avidity nor utopia but for a strong sense of reality; our access to finances is indispensable if we are to be able to initiate any action of solidarity and cooperation aiming to build our future.

Starting with Tabanka: the association was born in the Lazio region at the end of 2004, stemming from the willingness of people native of Cape Verde living in Italy, as well as others who live in their home country. Among

these, we encounter Maria de Lourdes Jesus, Hernani Moreira, Margarida Roscia, who decided to establish this association moved from a strong determination to perform in solidarity.

In this occasion, I would also like to introduce you the Nyeleti onlus. Its name originates in the Swahili language and it indicates the star Sirio. This star is made of two strong elements, the mother and the daughter: we chose this image because it represents a powerful relationship based on the global friendship between the founders of Nyeleti and our collaborators from various other countries. All of us who have African roots feel very strongly our double union with Europe and Africa.

The objective of Nyeleti is to identify and act in the social-sanitary field through cooperation, support, education and training for women and children, and the socially weak. The geographical range of our actions is directed towards every part of the world.

Nyeleti shares with Tabanka the desire to promote the culture of a new awareness of the self, of the other, and of our interrelations. As Tabanka, we also consider fundamental to be present and engaged in the place where we live. The Cape Verde community plays an active and important role in Italy, thanks to its working commitment in the life of the Italian population.

The followings are some of the projects that we have already completed:

- the reconstruction of ten houses in Coequeiro Castellao, San Nicolao Island, Cape Verde: it is a project financed by the city of Ascoli Piceno and the International Help Foundation (Fondazione agli Aiuti Internazionali, FAI). The dwellings have been inaugurated in July 2006;
- the creation of a sewing centre in the island of Saint Felipe, nearby the Equator, which is now fully operational;
- to improve the communication between Italians and migrants from Cape Verde residents in Italy, Tabanka has created the “Amilcar Cabral” award, which is designed to widen the knowledge of the history of Cape Verde and of some of its important personalities: *The more we know about our heroes the more we learn about ourselves*;
- knowing and giving voice to our young people is a priority objective of ours. Therefore, the association pays a peculiar attention to the new generation, future protagonist of tomorrow. Tabanka sponsored 2 publications, which have been subsequently presented to different audiences in Italy:

- a. a book for children written by Celina Pereira, “Storie e Storie” (*Tales and Tales*). Written in three languages – Italian, Portuguese and Creole – it narrates traditional tales from Cape Verde;
 - b. the second publication is “Racconti in Altalena” (*Tales in see-saw*), the first book written by Jorge Alves Canifa, who is also the first author of the second generation of migrants from Cape Verde living in Italy;
- creation of the theatre play “Gli affamati” (*The hungry ones*) by Jorge Alves Canifa, presented at the Palma club in Roma with a company of Italians and Cape Verdeans, and that has been highly appreciated. In fact, we consider that it is very innovative for an association like ours, to speak to self-represent ourselves in a clearly defined cultural discourse. *The hungry ones* tells an event which belongs to the history of the people of Cape Verde, and the initiatives stems from our desire to present ourselves to the Italian audience. To highlight and recognize together our histories who have been long forgotten in the past;
 - in occasion of a cultural week dedicated to Cape Verde, Tabanka has been invited by the Brazilian embassy in Rome thanks to, and in collaboration with, women from Brazil: there is a real solidarity among ourselves as women, and we wish to further it. For one week, we’ve organized handicrafts’ exhibitions and different cultural events dedicated to Cape Verde;
 - organisation and financing of the participation of ten people (mainly young) to the Fourth International Congress of the Cape Verdean diaspora in Praia, Cape Verde;
 - insofar as Tabanka considers the education as one of the most urgent priorities, we are currently sending school materials to the children of Cape Verde;
 - in 2007, Tabanka’s main project is the creation of a water pump in Mabua (Angola).

The decision to be present and act in many cities of Italy well represents the meaning of the word Tabanka, which signifies encounters, meetings, exchanges.

Finally, I would like to tell you something that moved my reflection. Cape Verde that is part of the Sahel area: the climate is very dry, there is no water, it hardly rains. But every year, women plant seeds in the hope that rain will

come and will make the seeds grow. If it doesn't rain, they plant seeds again the following year: on and on, until the rain will come.

The daily reality is to insist to create life, never giving up hope:

our perseverance is a must.

Annexes

Annex I

Tamkeen: fighting poverty through supporting Palestinian women

Conceived in the wake of the Beijing Women's Conference and the World Summit for Social Development, the Tamkeen program is part of the Cooperation Protocol established in 2000 between the Italian government and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). As a result, in 2002 about half-million USD was allocated for the reinforcement of government institutions and Palestinian civic organizations in the promotion of the empowerment of women.

The program's strategy has been designed in 2003 by the head of the Directorate for Gender Planning and Development (DGDP) of the PNA, Ms. Zahira Kamal, and the senior gender officer of the Italian General Directorate for Development Cooperation, Ms. Bianca Pomeranzi. Its main premises were:

- the adoption of the concept of “empowerment” (*tamkeen* in Arabic) as a milestone that would ensure Palestinian women's organizations protagonism in the struggle against poverty through the promotion of their access to the public sphere and the strengthening of their capacity to negotiate on development issues at all levels of public government;
- capitalizing on the history of political and solidarity relations between Italian and Palestinian women – which started in the first Intifada and lasted throughout the 90s thanks to the commitment of both countries' civil society and the financial support of a number of Italian local authorities – by directly involving women's organizations of both countries in the implementation of the program.

Accordingly, an Action Plan was developed as articulated into the following three components:

1. *Institutional building at the national level*

- Produce a concept paper on policies and practices of women's empowerment in Palestine, with the scientific support of the Institute of Women's Studies of Birzeit University, Ramallah.
- Upon the initiative of the DGDP of the PNA, convene a forum including women's organizations and women from national institutions that would constitute a consultative space to debate the program's main activities and initiatives.
- Support the institutional building phase of the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), which was established in November 2003 and substituted the DGDP.

2. *Training and communication*

- Develop a training program for the employees of GOs and NGOs in charge of the management of projects for the empowerment of women.
- Produce a media campaign aiming to stimulate collective reflection on gender roles in Palestinian society and to advertise government programs for the advancement of women.
- Organize two international seminars to present and discuss the program results.

3. *Institutional building at the district level*

- Conduct a feasibility study for the establishment of Women's Resource Centers at the district level.
- Convene two local forums (Hebron and Bethlehem) including women's organizations and women from the local institutions, designated to participate in the establishment process of the first two Women's Resources Centres.

These being the premises and main structure of the program, obviously its implementation has been severely affected by the crisis of the Oslo process, which ignited the outburst of the second Intifada on the 28th of September 2000. As a consequence, the emergency dimension has deeply marked all its life cycle, compelling to continuous reassessments of the scheduled activities, along with timeframes and budget allocation. The situation of social and political instability, dramatically worsened after the death of Yasser Arafat (November 2004), implied a number of breakdowns and changes in priorities for action, as well as frequent turnouts of the persons

designated to planning and monitoring activities.

Besides this – though in some way related to it –, a major change at the level of national institutions for the advancement of women happened just few months after the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Tamkeen program, as the premier Ahmad Qureia (Abu Ala), appointed in October 2003, agreed to create a Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) in place of the DGDP, as well as to designate Ms. Zahira Kamal at its head. Such a decision compelled to radical shifts in the program's perspective, moving emphasis away from initiatives "from below" towards state's decentralization issues; as well as from networking among women's organizations of the two partner countries towards "internal" negotiations involving prominent Palestinian women from governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Nevertheless, by the end of the first phase of the program (March 2005), some important results had been attained. Among them, the formulation of MOWA's Action plan 2005/2007, whose primary objective is «to secure a proper legal, legislative and political frame that is conscious of women's rights and needs, capable of integrating gender concerns, and encouraging women's empowerment and development in general and female youth in particular».

On June 2005, the Italian government through UNDP granted MOWA a further funding of about 100.000 USD to create the first two Women's Resources Centres at the district level, respectively in Hebron and Bethlehem. The centres took the name of Tawasol, an Arabic word which means *connection*.

Notwithstanding the commitment of the staff of MOWA and of the local women's organizations, this phase suffered from the change in the political leadership of the PNA as a result of the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, which saw the victory of the Change and Reform list (Hamas). The new premier, Ismail Hanyeh, appointed Dr. Maryem Saleh as the Minister of Women's Affairs. This change at the head of MOWA gave rise to conflicts between the staff and the new management, causing a slowdown in the activities of the Tawasols. Meanwhile, the Quartet (U.S., EU, Russia, UN) launched the boycott of the Hamas government that prevented UNDP from transferring the remaining funds to MOWA. As a matter of fact, MOWA was compelled to close the two newly created Tawasols centres due to the impossibility of ensuring their financial sustainability.

Annex II

Mehwar Centre for the protection and empowerment of women and families

“Mehwar” is a multifunctional centre and a national project which serves all the West Bank and it was foreseen to work in contact with Gaza. The centre is a facility of about 1800 square meters located in the Bethlehem area which, according to a feasibility study conducted in 2001, resulted the most suitable region in terms of community acceptance, institutional sensitivity to the problem, and professional resources available. It opened its doors in August 2006 to host three months of specialized training for its 22 staff members.

Its goals and principles are:

- to promote a progressive idea of *protection* based on the respect of human rights, dignity and well-being against the negative perception of shelters as “prisons” or closed and criminalizing places;
- to provide *specialized training* for the Centre’s staff as well as personnel of the related institutions *according to international standards*,
- to adopt *integrated and systematic interventions* taking into consideration the various needs of the women and children victims of violence (legal, social, psychological, recreational, etc) and family dynamics;
- to provide *specific and qualified psychological support* for the treatment of victims of violence;
- to promote *good governance* through the involvement of the specialized staff into participatory decision making processes, and the promotion of self-determination and independent management, sense of ownership, flexibility and interchangeability of roles;
- to strengthen *formal and informal networks* for support and

protection of the Centre, including the promotion of *voluntarism and solidarity among women* in the community;

- to fill the gap of a *scientific and exhaustive documentation* of the phenomenon of domestic violence, its causes and consequences, taking into special consideration the social costs of violence.

Its beneficiaries are:

- Women and girls who suffer from physical, psychological and sexual violence leading to physical and psychological damage, and whose lives are or may be threatened to death;
- Women victims and their children who are often suffering for the consequences of witnessing violence inside the family;
- Children and/or families in distress;
- School students (for prevention programs);
- Bethlehem governorate's civil society.

The services provided by the centre are:

- *Temporary hospitality* for women and minors victims of violence (a maximum of 35 guests);
- *Legal counselling* provided by specialized lawyers for the women victims and their families, including follow up in the courts;
- *Services for women's psycho-physical well-being*: preventive health counselling, general health and gynaecological counselling, psychological counselling as well as individual and group therapy including self help groups; in addition, a small Gym will organize activities for the psycho-physical well-being of women and their children;
- *Skills training and job orientation* for women victims of violence providing women's guests with opportunities to improve their education and professionalism, strengthening their social network and supporting them towards financial independence;
- *Family counselling* provided by a multidisciplinary team of lawyers, social workers, physicians and psychologists and supporting families in difficult circumstances, helping them to prevent violent relations, facilitating communication and supporting vulnerable and victimized members when possible;
- *Support to childhood and parenthood & kindergarten* providing

psycho-social counselling to parents who aim to improve and strengthen their relationship with their children, as well as to children in distress; specialized psycho-social support will be offered to those parents whose children were victims and/or testimonies of violence as well as to the children victims themselves; in addition, a small kindergarten will be available;

- *Prevention & awareness raising programs* in order to sensitize the community about positive gender roles within the family and the society, about human rights in general and women's and children rights in particular, about gender based violence including any kind of discrimination, marginalisation and stigmatization of women and children;
- *Cafeteria.*

In the long term, we expect to achieve the following results:

- Attitudes, understanding, concepts related to gender based violence, gender equity, women's status, women's needs modified;
- Pilot experience, international standards adopted into national policies and replicated at a wider scale in Palestine and in the Middle East;
- Laws and policies related to protection and empowerment of women improved according to actual women's needs;
- Solidarity among women being culturally adopted as a practice of social crises resolution, self and mutual help, community development.

Annex III

The Med Espace Femmes Network: a partnership between the two banks of the Mediterranean

Talking about equality of rights and integrating this dimension into all policies implies passing from the concept of weakness and vulnerability, of women as disadvantaged individuals, to the awareness of the strength that women can mobilize for developing a democratic society. In this perspective, IMED has promoted and committed itself to a *long-term strategy of female empowerment* through the collaboration between women on both shores of the Mediterranean. Starting with citizen's rights, it then expanded to include specific interventions to promote women's economic empowerment and combat violence against women.

The initiative to defend and promote the "Rights to citizenship of women in Maghreb" was launched by IMED in collaboration with some women's associations, trade unions and NGOs in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia.⁷¹ In some years, it has given rise to an international network, the "Réseau Med Espace Femmes" (Réseau MEF, *Network of women from the Mediterranean basin*).

Through the years, this work has been carried out in various phases. The first phase focused on studying and researching themes such as legislation concerning work, family rights, the history of the women's movement and issues linked to employment. Indeed, the emerging needs led Réseau MEF to decide to carry out projects and interventions of various kinds and scales in the three countries of the Maghreb, to promote women's economic empowerment and combat violence against women.

⁷¹ The activities concerning citizenship women rights and gender difference were launched at the beginning of the '90 by Maria Grazia Ruggerini and Bernadette Rigaud, later on Francesca Malaguti and Monica Mancini joined the first two at IMED to work in this field.

This is the route that led to launching the project “Positive actions for women’s rights to citizenship and equal opportunities in Maghreb, 2001-2004”, financed within the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights – MEDA Programme. The goal of this initiative was to foster the recognition of rights from a well-rooted universalistic perspective, nonetheless in the awareness of pluralism and gender-based and cultural differences. It aimed to: (a) respect local particularities to ensure an enriching exchange; (b) create equal opportunities for women while recognising and respecting gender differences; (c) launch an exchange between women and men as a basis for the growth of democracy in each country; (d) work to promote a transformation on objective and subjective level – i.e. towards a change in reality and in oneself; in material conditions and in the mindset of both public and private spheres. This project concluded in January 2005 and led to the creation of three women’s Community Houses in Constantine, Tangier and Tunis, which are multifunctional spaces for meetings, awareness-raising, training, advice and assistance on legal, psychological, social and health-related matters.

Later on, from February 2005 to December 2006, it was followed by the project “Promotion and support for the economic empowerment of women in Maghreb” (PRISME), financed by UNDP and entrusted to IMED as part of the ART-GOLD Maghreb programme⁷². Its specific objective was to strengthen the three women’s Community Houses as sustainable tools for the promotion of women’s empowerment. Its strategy focused on economic empowerment as a fundamental part of a global process of *self-empowerment*, which concerns the enhancement, visibility and valorisation of both “formal” and caring work. In other words, fostering society’s recognition of the complexity and importance of women’s socio-economic roles. Its main activities were:

- participatory planning workshops to elaborate a national strategy and the plan of action together with each House;
- participatory mapping of the territory to support work and enterprises for women and, in general, to promote women’s economic empowerment starting from existing resources, needs, hopes, abilities, problems and proposals;
- realising a service and pilot action to support women in finding a job and/or setting up small businesses, by facilitating their access to the resources necessary to enter the labour market, based on their

⁷² Support for Thematic and Territorial Networks for Local Governance and Development in Maghreb

abilities, experiences and hopes;

- creating and consolidating a network of services on the territory to promote women's economic empowerment, which encompasses both institutions and civil society organizations;
- promoting the Houses' sustainability by strengthening staff's and volunteers' capacities;
- supporting pilot income-generation and fund-raising initiatives for the Houses;
- re-organising and strengthening existing services to coordinate them with new activities, aiming to facilitate the global empowerment of women;
- carrying out training and awareness raising activities to promote women's rights and the acknowledgement of the importance of their role in local development;
- designing and applying a participatory monitoring system for the internal and external evaluation of the Project.

The three Women's Community Houses in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia have become spaces in which to promote avenues for women's empowerment that will be sustainable in the long term and strongly rooted in their different contexts of intervention. Though now working independently, objectives and strategies of the Réseau MEF still lie at the core of the Houses's activities, which widen and deepen the work carried out so far: from initiatives to combat violence against women, to supporting women entering the labour market, to migrations.

Annex IV

Seminar programme

14th December 2006

9.30: Welcome to the seminar

Luciano Gonnella, representative of UNDP/UNOPS

10.00: How/What/Who in women's networking across borders

Chairperson: Silvia Macchi. *Key speakers:*

Bianca Pomeranzi, Women's networking for new strategies of partnership

Ruba Salih, Women's networking and citizenship strategies between Europe and the Mediterranean

Gabriella Rossetti, Women facing eastward (and southward): geographies of partnership

Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, Women's networking in the fight against violence

Touria Tajeddine; Med Espace Femmes and the building of the women's house in Tager

11.30: Sharing our experience of networking

Parallel workshops

14.30: The network we want

Parallel workshops

16.00: Reports from workshops and discussion

Chairperson: Silvia Macchi

15th December 2006

10.00: Women's networking and international cooperation: who changes whom?

Chairperson: Gabriella Rossetti. *Key speakers:*

Zahira Kamal, The role of international cooperation in the empowerment of Palestinian women

Elena Zambelli, Paris, Texas, Tel Aviv – a practitioner's reflection on international cooperation in Palestine in the good governance era

Silvia Macchi, How does the need for mutual accountability in aid relationships change women's networking? The role of political participation "here" and "there"

Charito Basa, Women in diaspora philanthropy: the experiences in Italy

11.30: Sharing our experience of international cooperation

Parallel workshops

14.30: The results we expect

Parallel workshops

16.00: Reports from workshops and discussion

Chairperson: Gabriella Rossetti

16th December 2006

9.00: Opening session

Silvia Macchi, CIRPS/SPED, La Sapienza University of Rome

9.15: Towards a regional law for the promotion of rights and full equality of migrant citizens

Anna Pizzo, Councillor of the Lazio Region

9.30: Women migrants citizens' vision for renewing development cooperation

Mercedes Frias, Italian Parliament Member

Josette Martial, Tabanka Association

Pilar Saravia, NO.DI. Association

Charito Basa, Filippino Women Council

11.30: Women's networks between Italy and the Middle East: reflections on cooperation activities for women's empowerment

Gabriella Rossetti, University of Ferrara

Zahira Kamal, former Minister of Women's Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority

Maha Abu-Dayyeh, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, Palestine

Touria Tajeddine, Réseau Espace Citoyenneté – Maison des Femmes, Tanger

13.00: Conclusions

Bianca Pomeranzi, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs / General Directorate for Development Cooperation

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Women's networking across borders and conflicts was practiced at least for the past twenty years, covering the most burning global and local issues throughout the planet. Trans-national networking made possible to reach a widely shared consensus during the years of the U.N. Conferences in the 90s (Riode, Janiero, Cairo, Beijin) where goals were set and strategies designed which are still reference points for global policies (from Gender and Development to Women's Empowerment). Wider and wider networks were created which often lived not so much "across" as "beyond" and "above" borders.

In the meanwhile, crossing borders became the life experience, often painful and not freely chosen, shared by millions. The feminization of migration flows and of diaspora were faced as a political (not only social) issue by women in movements and associations. Face to face encounters forced many to tackle differences and inequalities; from the well known ones between rich and poor areas of the world, to the subtler ambiguities of cultures, value systems, memories, patterns of belonging and of citizenship. Looking for links and shared visions has become more challenging and, we might hope, more rewarding at the end.

Within this context, many women (several Italian groups among them) have invented and practiced new ways of creating links across borders; many have studied patterns of belonging and of citizenship. Networks were created, many were broken and dissolved, new ones were formed.

History produced changes: as an example, networks with women living in conflict areas, like women in the Middle East, have deeply changed their meaning through time (in Palestine, between the first and the second Intifada) while the very meaning and political use of "borders" was changing.

Networks between "native" and "migrant" women were also transformed in time; from those centred around solidarity and support, managed by the "natives" to those managed by the "migrants" focused on the quality of citizenship. Key words, such as "solidarity", "empowerment", "cooperation", "reciprocity" and "recognition", need now deep scrutiny.

Where are we now? What was left of this story of twenty and more years of interactions, since the times in which it seemed so easy to find common visions and shared goals? What have the young generations inherited, for instance, in Italy and in Palestine? Why and how to continue in the efforts to build dialogues, meetings and projects together?

How is it possible, today, having searched deeply into the meanings of "empowerment" and therefore of "power", to build some kind of "power with"? In other words, to build networks which can be effective in the quest for justice, equity, dignity, freedom from violence, but also for a better life for all?

In a world which celebrates differences using them as weapons of aggression and rejection, women, who have defended and practiced the "difference" of their point of view, still have a lot to say and to do.

Is it feasible to launch, perhaps with the active leadership of the young generations, new networks across those borders which have so dramatically changed meaning? Which "houses", "dwellings", "public spaces", real and symbolic, can be imagined and created?